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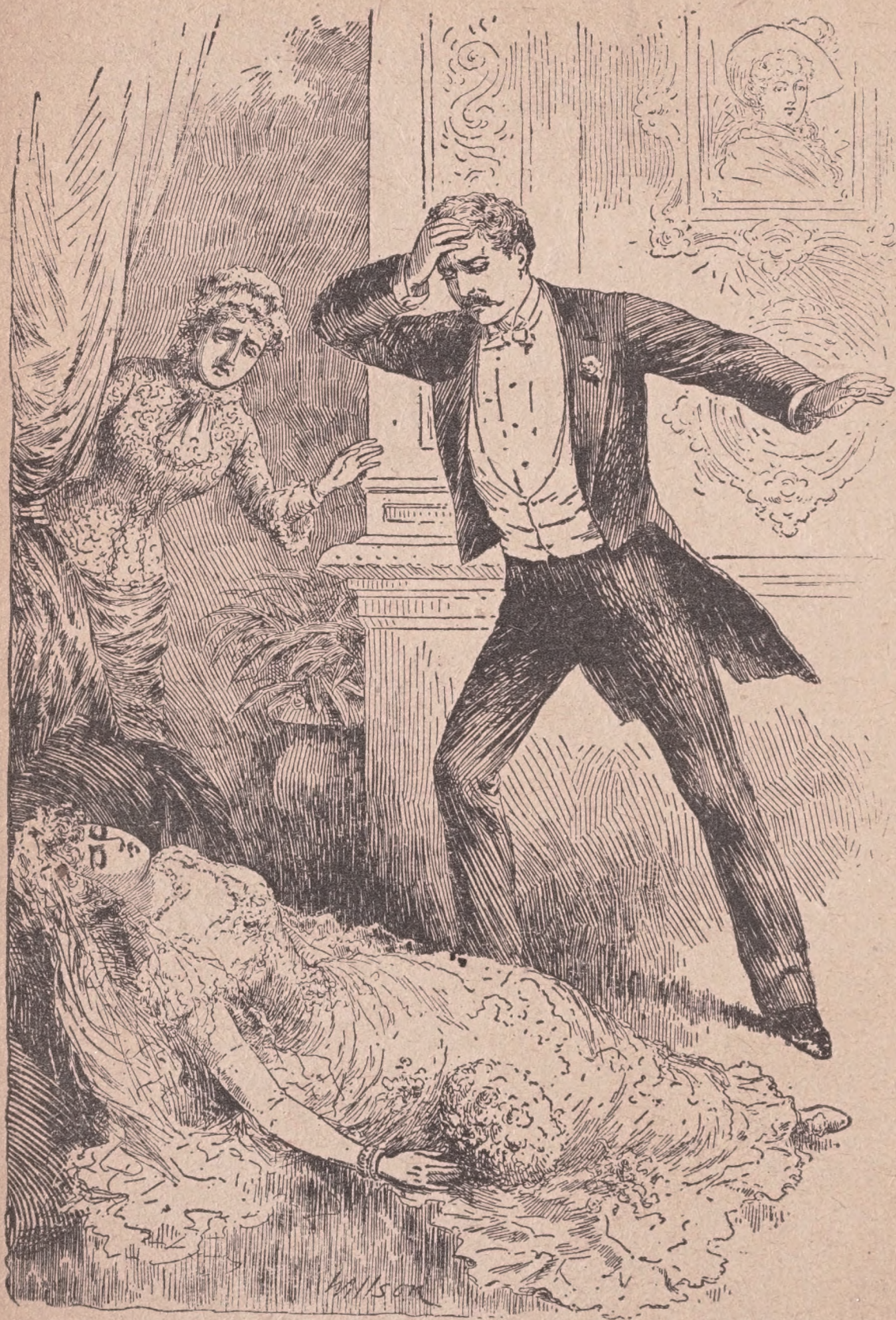
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SERIES

A HEART'S
BITTERNESS
BY BERTHA M. CLAY.

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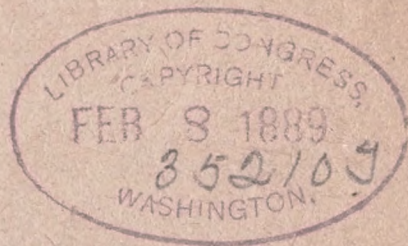
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A HEART'S BITTERNESS.

40 BY



BERTHA M. CLAY,

AUTHOR OF "ONLY ONE SIN," "ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE,"
"A HEART'S IDOL," ETC.

NEW YORK:
STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
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A HEART'S BITTERNESS.

CHAPTER I.

“THE MOTHER’S FATE PURSUES THE CHILD.”

“Lady Burton—dear Lady Burton, only fancy what is the latest item of society news!”

Lady Burton slowly dropped the old and yellow letter with the faded lines, and turned to greet the brilliant girl, whose piquant, cheerful face looked out from under the plumed hat.

“My dear Grace, you always have some startling ‘Notes on the Fashionable World.’ What now?”

Grace Fanshaw dropped on an ottoman, and laid her glove on her friend’s knee. She *had* news to startle Lady Burton. What joy!

“Violet Ainslie is to marry Lord Norman Leigh in a month.”

“Violet Ainslie to be married! and so soon! I cannot believe it, Grace.”

“You may, Lady Burton—it is certainly so. I was with Lady Clare Montessor last evening, and she showed me a note that Violet had written, asking her to be her first bride-maid.”

“Two months ago Violet spent a week with me before I went to Italy, and she said that she did not wish nor expect

to marry. She seemed to have an aversion to the idea of marriage."

"Well, poor dear, who wouldn't in her case?" cried Grace. "With two millions of pounds in her own right, what is a girl to look for? The instant she appears in public every eye is on her. How can she ever expect to be loved, followed, admired, courted, without reference to her immense fortune? Violet had come to have a mania about it."

"The perils of a great heiress are as terrible as those of a great beauty," said Lady Burton. "Violet had her millions impressed on her from the time she could hear anything—they had been the chorus of her life—and Lord Leigh is surely the—a——"

"Happy man? Yes—at least Violet so asserts him in the note. You look doubtful, Lady Burton."

"I thought he was paying attention to Lady Clare Montessor herself, three years ago."

"That was before his father died—he has not since."

"But this is all very sudden. Lord Leigh was paying her no more attention than others were two months ago. Indeed Violet shrank from attention."

"I know it. She seemed never able to receive it in pleased frankness as an honest tribute; there were always the millions, you know. And then, you know, Violet is as shy as a five-year-old child, and has been brought up in seclusion, like a nun—the Ainslies seemed always afraid some one would run off with the millions."

"The mother's fate pursues the child," sighed Lady Burton.

"Dear Lady Burton, what are you saying? See, here is this letter you were reading fallen to the floor."

"My dear Grace, it is a singular coincidence; this old letter was written to me by Violet's mother just before her marriage. I was her bride-maid. I loved her well."

“She was a Lady Lucy Montessor, Lady Clare’s aunt?”

“Yes, and as unfortunate in having too little money as her child is in having too much. There were five daughters and a son—ancient and poor—as some recent earls had indulged in gambling and horse-racing. They all married rich—Lady Lucy, in marrying the banker, Frederick Ainslie, richest of all. The present earl married the heiress of a great manufacturer——”

“And Lady Lucy died young?”

“She married at seventeen, and died at twenty-nine, when her only child was two years old.”

“Do you know, Violet seems to me like a little princess out of a fairy tale. Just think of the ten years, from five to fifteen, that she spent with her grandmother in the great gray, grim, ancient mansion in the Lincolnshire fens—a real ‘Mariana in the Moated Grange!’ Fancy! She saw no one but the grandmother, the servants, the governess, the rector, and the lawyer. Every one of them older than the other, and she never was allowed to read poetry, except some dreadful old stuff out of date long ago, never a novel, nor to see a young person, and when the grandmother died, it was as if Violet was let out of a great state prison, as historic princesses from the tower.”

“It was so, indeed. And owing to her shyness, and the domestic tastes of her aunt, Mrs. Ainslie, Violet, with only her very moderate knowledge of society, gained in part of one quiet season, is still to all intents a twelve-year-old child!”

“You quite frighten me, putting it that way,” said Grace, ready tears sweeping into her bright eyes. “Indeed the girl can hardly know her mind.”

Lady Burton bent her head on her hand, a look of deep anxiety passing over her pale, high-bred face.

“Do not grieve, dear Lady Burton,” said the spoiled beauty at her feet, patting her cheek; “let us have no dark

prognostications at the marriage of so sweet a creature as Violet Ainslie."

"She is sweet, indeed. I think I never met a more fair, charming creature. Heaven only knows how I have hoped and prayed for her happiness."

"I know you love her, even better than any of the rest of us, dear Lady Burton, and you are only too good to all of us."

Lady Burton was the ideal and the idol of a large circle of young girls, and her influence over them was ennobling and delightful. She loved to surround herself with blooming youth and high spirits, to elevate their sentiments and cultivate their hearts. Her preference was a sort of high mark for the moral and mental dispositions of those she selected for her favorites. She smiled as Grace spoke.

"I think it is impossible to be too good to any of you. It is indeed 'a rosebud garden of girls,' by which I am continually surrounded," and she bent to kiss the red, laughing lips.

"We shall be a rosebud garden, or garland of girls, I assure you, at Violet's wedding—fourteen of us—only fancy."

Lady Burton sighed deeply.

"Why, don't sigh as if it was an execution, dearest," cried the lively maiden. "Violet is past eighteen, and—oh, let me tell you what my aunt said this very morning, 'she is marrying one of the oldest titles in England.' Just as if it were the *title*, not the *man*."

"Heaven send it is the man, with a good, true, loyal, well-founded love between them," said Lady Burton, who had lived to see many very miserable matches, many shamefully broken ones, and many supremely happy ones. She herself could speak from experience on both sides. Her first marriage had been a misery, nobly endured, so long as God willed; her second a union of two brave, loving hearts.

"You must give her all manner of good advice," said Grace, tapping Lady Burton's hand, as she saw her fall into reverie.

"I must, indeed. I returned only yesterday from France."

"And your poor cousin died while you were with her. Pardon me for not having spoken of it before."

"It was an end long expected. I was looking in my cabinet for an old letter from her, when I came upon these, from my early friend, Lady Lucy Montessor."

"At least, Lady Burton, Violet need not fear that Lord Leigh is marrying her for her millions. He can afford to marry for love; he is rich in money, as in antiquity of title; and he is young and good-looking, and a very good fellow. No one ever heard a word against him. He is grave, shy, not so very fond of society, a little gloomy, perhaps. I never saw any one take a thing to heart as he did his father's death, and you know the old saying, 'a good son makes a good husband.'"

"My dear Grace," cried Lady Burton, "let me kiss you. You are the most comforting creature. You always speak good of people. It is a lovely quality in you."

"But in this case, Lady Burton, there is only good to be said. I hear your horses before the door. My aunt's coupe is there for me. My love to Violet."

A few moments after Lady Burton had entered her own coupe, and ordered the coachman "to 9 Portland place."

It was the residence of the banker, Henry Ainslie.

"Miss Ainslie is never engaged to you, my lady," said the footman, "though she is refused to all others this morning."

Too impatient to sit down, Lady Burton walked about the drawing-room for a moment or two. The owner had no titles and the mistress of the house was but of homely taste, but, by grace of unlimited money, it was one of the

finest drawing-rooms in London, as became the dwelling of a prince of finance. In a moment Violet's maid entered.

"Would you come up to Miss Ainslie's boudoir, my lady? She is anxious to see you, but cannot come down."

CHAPTER II.

"DO YOU TRULY LOVE?"

Lady Burton went up the well-known stair, and the maid threw open the door of the heiress' boudoir. The most fashionable mantau-maker in London, and her three chief assistants, were in possession. Leaning back in a great stuffed chair, her eye-glasses in hand, her face illuminated with pride and interest, was the portly, kindly figure of Mrs. Ainslie, the banker's wife.

In the center of the room, and the cynosure of all eyes, was a charming, dainty girl-figure, with white, dimpled arms, statuesquely folded, all clad from shoulders to toe in the white of a cambric dressing-jacket and her white petticoat, with its multitudinous lace frills, while before her knelt Madame Lamlini, the modiste, holding against her "subject" ample folds of silk and lace, a mass that looked like the curled and crested foam-bright waves of the sea.

In half-undress, standing to be draped and fitted, bare-necked, bare-armed, pensive, silent, lost as in some curious maze, this was she, Violet Ainslie, the great heiress, the orphan holder of burdensome millions, doomed to be her curse.

The opening of the boudoir door drew the girl from her fancies with a start. She held out her hand.

"I am a prisoner *des modes*," she said.

Mrs. Ainslie came forward, her usual heartiness intensified by her honest regard and as honest awe for Lady Burton.

"So good of you, Lady Burton, to come to us. Violet was to go to you as soon as Madame Lambini released her; but you see now we are so hurried in our preparations——"

Meanwhile two small, tremulous hands had seized upon Lady Burton, and held her fast, with a nervous, almost despairing clasp. Her right hand thus imprisoned, Lady

Burton smiled, and was obliged to offer her left hand to Mrs. Ainslie, who accepted it with ardor.

"I see," said Lady Burton, looking about, "that it is true."

"Oh, yes, quite true," said Mrs. Ainslie, with open delight.

Lady Burton turned a clear, steadfast, searching eye on Violet's flushing face.

"Let me go instantly, madam," cried Violet. "I have chosen enough for you to begin on. I am tired. Kate, a dressing-wrap."

Kate threw a down-trimmed robe over her young lady's shoulders; and Violet, still holding Lady Burton's hand, drew her into her dressing-room, and, the instant the door was shut, threw herself with a burst of tears upon the bosom of her friend.

Lady Burton, folding the girl in her arms, allowed this emotion to have its way. Presently Violet recovered herself, pushed back the moist ripples of brown hair from her forehead, and a smile flashed through her tears, like the sun through summer rain.

"Forgive me! You always look so motherly to me, that it is in your presence I give way."

"Let me be motherly," said Lady Burton, leading her to a divan and holding her clasped in her arm. "I loved your mother. To-day I come to you in her name. May I speak, and will you answer freely?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Are these tears sorrow or excitement?"

"I think—excitement," said Violet, with a fascinating little smile.

"My child, do you truly love the man you are to marry?" Violet locked and unlocked her pink fingers as she said, with a pathetic droop of her mouth, and her straight look:

"Lady Burton, I do not know."

Such an answer, before an announced engagement, would have roused Lady Burton to vigorous protest. Now another course was needful.

"Violet, do you love this man beyond all others? Is he more pleasing to you than other men?"

"Lady Burton, you know I have seen almost nothing of men. I saw no men until I came here three years ago—few since, until this season; and then, oh, I have been

taught to suspect them all. I have refused ten; ten who hardly knew me! It was too dreadful!"

"Violet, are you sure you so much prefer this man to others, that he will always be your preference?"

"Lady Burton," said Violet, erecting her pretty head, "I should never fail to do my duty!"

"Bear with me while I search your heart. We human beings are so weak, beyond our dream, that sometimes we are betrayed by ourselves, before we are aware. Is it a joy, a content, to think of spending your life with Lord Leigh? The years of our life may be many and long. While youth is glowing, while maturity ripens, while age comes on, will you be content to spend your life in the shadow of this man's love, and within the circle of his arm?"

"I suppose so," said Violet, hesitatingly, and with a troubled look, "I have as yet thought of it only in this way. I shall be safe only in my own home, and no longer the golden apple of conflict between the Ainslies and Montressors. My poor, kind aunt will not longer be victimized and tortured by the Montessor aunts on my behalf, my uncle will no longer assure me that he is getting gray in caring for my dreadful millions. I will no longer be pursued for my millions, and having old men and young, good and bad—men I hardly know by sight—flinging themselves at my feet, and protest they desire only my love, and to hear Uncle Henry say solemnly, 'Another, Violet!' This is the sixth, eight, tenth, as the case may be, just as if I were the boldest coquette; and aunt reply, with a groan, 'poor dear, what can you expect?'"

"Yes, my child, I understand. This is a little evil picture, that comes linked with your great fortune. But do you love your chosen husband enough to yield to his wishes; to prefer his wishes to your own, to seek first his comfort? To make his comfort the study of your life, as heretofore your own comfort has been?"

"Must I do all that?" said Violet, innocently.

"These expectations and plans seem natural to real love."

"Perhaps they will come in time?" suggested Violet.

"Love can and does grow if cherished. But let me warn you, dear, that no woman, not even an unloved wife, is so unhappy as an unloving wife. Love and self-sacrifice bring their own consolations. I see no comfort for the wife who does not love."

"Perhaps I do love Lord Leigh; he is very—nice," said Violet, meditatively, but the tone made Lady Burton's heart sink with fear; while the girl added quickly, "And really, he is, I think, very fond of me. He has asked me three times——"

"Fond of you!" cried Lady Burton, "could any man in his senses be less than fond of such an innocent, winsome creature as you, Violet?"

"You see, he is so rich, I feel as if he can love me for myself," said Violet, with a flush. "*He* cannot be fortune-hunting. I respect Lord Leigh. I like him; and when I get used to the idea, I think, Lady Burton, I am capable of loving."

"My darling, you were born to love—warmly."

"But, if I found he had deceived me—not loved me for myself—oh, how unutterably I should hate him, or any one."

Lady Burton trembled at the girl's tone and her pallor.

"It is not likely in his case. But, Violet, do delay this marriage."

"No, no; it is too late. I cannot endure this being hunted. No, I must take my risk now, before I am hunted to death."

CHAPTER III.

THE SMITTEN BRIDE.

Leaving Violet in the hands of maids and modistes, Lady Burton went down stairs with the effusive Mrs. Ainslie at her side.

"Dear Lady Burton, I hope you are pleased. If we had had your address you should have been the first to be forewarned, but, then, it has really been very sudden, and Violet was going to you this morning."

"But what was the occasion of so hasty a decision?" asked Lady Burton, calmly. "I had hoped Violet, in her peculiar position, would wait a year or two."

"Oh, Lady Burton, a year or two! How can you! I assure you Henry and I would both be in our graves with anxiety. He is more weighed down by the care of her fortune than by all his other business. And as for me, I can

hardly sleep nights for fear the darling girl should make a bad match. Lord Leigh is such an admirable match, every way. His title, family, great fortune, manners—a little cold and sad—but amiable, honorable, unblemished reputation. Why,” cried Mrs. Ainslie, warming with her subject, he is the great match of the season; every-one wanted him!”

Lady Burton smiled a little at that way of putting it.

“But, Mrs. Ainslie, while I know all this is true, if she does not really love him, what comfort in marriage?”

“*Love*, my dear Lady Burton, for her it will come in its day. She knows no more of it now than a vestal, and she never will until she is married. She is a victim of a mania about fortune-hunters.”

“She lacks vanity—a consciousness of her own desert—and I think you have all contributed to this idea.”

“Well, I really believe she loves Lord Leigh, and that he loves her. Why not?”

“I don’t see how he could help it, truly.”

“Do, Lady Burton, peep into the conservatory. Is it not exquisite? Well, just there, on that seat, under the orange tree in bloom, he proposed. I came in after a few minutes. I admit I was distracted to know if she would do what was for her happiness; and he said, ‘Mrs. Ainslie, Violet has done me the honor to accept me.’ Think if I was glad!”

“Still, I wish they would wait a year to consider.”

“Oh, Lady Burton, a year! Why, she wanted to wait three months, and he was so desperate for an immediate marriage that finally she yielded. And for me it comes just right. I expect to have the two elder girls introduced next season, and I shall take the whole family to the Continent as soon as Violet is off my hands. The girls need six months there to finish up their French and German. Dear things, I can now give up all my time to them. Only think, how dangerously Violet would have been in their way, and now she will help them on. With Lady Leigh they can go everywhere. It will relieve me of half my cares.”

“I see; but in this marriage Violet is the one to consider.”

“But I do consider. Think if I am not proud and glad to restore her to the position her grandmother Montessor occupied—an earl’s wife. Violet will be a sweet countess.”

"Would she be a happy countess?" thought Lady Burton.

It was idle to stay and hear Mrs. Ainslie talk longer. The best-natured creature in the world, she had attained the nearest summit of her hopes, and saw before her, in joyful near existence, pinnacles of coroneted glory for her troop of plain, jolly, honest-hearted girls.

Mrs. Ainslie kept Violet in a tumult of splendid preparations. Gifts poured in. Ainslie and Leigh jewels were reset to grace the wealthiest bride that ever had entered the ever fortunate house of Leigh. As for Violet, hers was an hour of bewilderment. Her aunt's approbation shone on her; the congratulations of all the family greeted her; peace was proclaimed between the Montressors—her mother's patrician house—and the rich Ainslies, who had been left guardian of her person and property by her father. She drifted on this favoring tide.

Lady Burton spoke again to Violet upon the subject of her marriage.

"My child, if you have any hesitation or objection, it is not too late. Better be called a coquette, than *be* a loveless, reluctant wife. Leave all, and come with me. I will take you to America, to Egypt, anywhere, until the comment has passed."

"No, Lady Burton, I think I am right, and shall be happy. I think I am loved for myself alone. The only time any one seemed to care for me, not knowing I was rich, that one forgot me at once—*forgot me!*"

"Violet, is there any one whom you love, whose image lies in your heart?"

"Indeed, no—a thousand times no! I hate him!—the mercenary wretch!"

"Why, Violet!" said Lady Burton, "*I am* surprised!"

She could say no more, for a secret feeling of honor held her bound. By her first marriage Lady Burton had a son—Lord Kenneth Keith—and she had hoped, solely because she loved Violet, that some day Violet and Kenneth might meet and love. Violet's singular whim—fostered, yes, implanted by her grandmother, that all who sought her sought her for her fortune—had kept Lady Burton from speaking of her son, who was abroad, and from bringing him home to introduce to Violet. She had wished Violet to have experience and freedom of choice before they met. But this, her secret wish, held her from opposing this mar-

riage. Might she not be speaking rather her own desire, than inner righteousness in the case?

The marriage morning, the first of June, dawned fair—matchless day for a matchless wedding scene.

The space about the chancel of St. George seemed as if filled by bands of angels. when Violet Ainslee stood there, with her fourteen lovely attendants. Surrounded with beauty, music, flowers, fragrance, friends, Violet held out that soft, white, well-dowered hand to Lord Norman Leigh, and her sweet lips said, softly, “I will.”

Neither bride, nor groom, nor priest, nor people dreamed that, heavy and remorseless as the blow of “the hammer of Thor,” a terrible wrong and fate would crush and shatter that vow before it had been kept for one brief hour! Sunshine in glory blazing all about her, and, under the sunshine, cruel destruction darkening over the life of this innocent child.

* * * * *

The wedding breakfast is over; carriages wait; the Ainslies and the Montressors are in blissful amity. In the magnificent boudoir of Mrs. Ainslie the groom is to see his bride for a moment alone before she is taken to put on her traveling-dress, as they set forth for Paris and Italy. A matchless bride of sweet and sunny beauty, and all blessed possibilities, she stands, as her aunt left her, gleaming in satin, lace, and pearls, her bridal flowers in her hand, her face bent over the sweet, languishing, fatal breath of one central tuberose.

A tuberose in a bridal bouquet!

* * * * *

Mrs. Ainslie opens the door for Lord Norman Leigh.
“Here is your bride.”

The scarcely uttered words die in a wild scream at a terrible sight.

Yes, here is his bride—a white, still, prostrate figure, lying supine on the floor, in all her glory of jewels and lace, in all the gorgeous color of the boudoir—all the hope and the radiance gone out of her bridal day!

CHAPTER IV.

THE TERRIBLE TRUTH.

What had smitten hope, courage, happiness out of the bride of an hour? What had stopped the bounding pulses of her sweet young life, and laid her cold, silent, prostrate, as one dead?

These are not Borgia or De Medici times, when one sends poison in a bouquet. It was not her bridal flowers, not even Lady Clare Montessor's tuberose that had sealed her fate. No. Upon her untried, innocent, unsuspecting ear had fallen the unaccustomed voice of truth; and oh, how chilling, how cruel, how terrible, how fatal truth can sometimes be! The naked truth is sometimes as deadly and unsparing as a naked sword.

When Mrs. Ainslie, full of pride, joy, benevolence to all the world, threw open the door of her boudoir to her new and titled nephew, to put him face to face with the charming, white-veiled, innocent creature, whose life had just been indissolubly bound to his own, and instead of blushing cheeks and smiling eyes, saw prostration, rigidity, pallor, unconsciousness, she gave a wild cry:

"She is dead! she is dead!"

Lord Leigh, with a look of terror, bent over his fallen bride. The treasure he had won with a swift good fortune that surprised himself, was it to be lost as soon as won? Then he felt life still fluttering in the tender frame, and recalled that the house was full of guests. He was one who lived in careful regard of public opinion, concealing all that might arouse remark.

"It is a fainting attack," he said. "Give me your vinaigrette. Call Sir Roger Parker, please; he is below; and bring a maid, Mrs. Ainslie; but do not seem alarmed."

His composed manner had neither the ardor nor anxiety of a devoted young lover trembling for his idol; but its calm practicality restored Mrs. Ainslie's courage.

Left alone for an instant with his insensible bride, Lord Leigh, while endeavoring to restore her, had his eyes fixed

rather on the room than on Violet. He scanned every corner. It was a room without concealments—no closets, no heavy draperies.

“If that demon has done this,” he said, between his set teeth, his usually indifferent, grave face contracting in a look of rage, “I would feel equal to something desperate. But no! she cannot have been here.”

“What is this?” cried a voice at his side. “Oh, I knew something would happen!”

It was Lady Burton. Mrs. Ainslie’s cry had reached an ear alert for sounds of woe. All that brilliant wedding-day Lady Burton had been haunted by anxiety, and when that one scream came to her, as she stood with some of the lady’s maids in Violet’s boudoir waiting to see the bride dressed in her traveling costume, she felt the shrill cry of confirmation of her fears, and hastened to the room where was the new-made Countess of Leigh.

“This is not an ordinary fainting fit,” said Lady Burton, as Sir Roger Parker bent over the still form, and Mr. and Mrs. Ainslie anxiously awaited his verdict.

“It looks like a severe and sudden nervous shock,” said the court physician; “yet that is quite impossible.”

“Certainly it is impossible,” said Lord Leigh. “She is all health and happiness, and has not been alone five minutes to-day.”

She had been alone fifteen—a fatal fifteen.

“She is reviving,” said Mrs. Ainslie, presently, and stole away to still any rumors that might arise among her guests.

Shortly life came back in tremulous thrills to that prostrate form; the delicate color stole into the round cheeks; the pearly throat began to flutter with returning respiration, and then the sweet brown eyes opened wide. Sir Roger naturally thought that the face of the young husband would be the most comforting sight for those lovely eyes, and stepped back to give place to his lordship, who bent over his bride with a look of assured possession.

Violet met that look with a gaze of horror and intense aversion. Then the dainty form shook from head to foot, entire consciousness had come with a weight of woe; her hand, that soft little hand, whereon shone the diamond half-circle of their engagement-ring, and the plain thick circle given that morning at the sacred altar, was laid upon

her bridegroom's breast, as with all her little strength she pushed him from her.

Then she turned, threw her arm about Lady Burton's neck, hid her face on her bosom, and burst into tears.

"I think we will do well to leave your countess alone for a time with Lady Burton," said Sir Roger, calmly.

"What do you think of her? What does this mean?" asked Lord Leigh, as he left the room with the physician.

"Simply terror, excitement, a sudden vague alarm," said Sir Roger, quietly. "The feelings of young girls have very singular developments. I am surprised at nothing. In a little time she will recover herself."

Lord Leigh looked at him narrowly. He had seen, and had he not comprehended the look in Violet's eyes, the action of her hand? Evidently not. They meant much to Lord Leigh, although he could not reach their cause.

Left alone with Violet, Lady Burton gently stroked her hair, seeking to soothe her by silence and tenderness, but full of grievous apprehension. There had been some terrible nervous shock, some heart shock. Lady Burton could not be deceived; and the bridegroom, with his anxiety about the effect on others, rather than of his bride—he realized it also.

"My sweet, are you better?" said Lady Burton.

"No, no, I shall never be better. Take me away—you said you would take me away. Take me to the other side of the world. Take me as if I were your child."

"My darling, if you were my own child I could not take you away now, for you are in another's keeping. Do you forget—you are to start with your husband for Dover.

"I will not take the train for Dover!" cried Violet, sharply.

"My love! It is necessary—all arrangements are made."

"I will not go with that man!" cried Violet again.

"Violet, what words are these? He is your husband."

"Tell me," said the poor young creature, gathering herself up, in all her pallor and her wedding splendors, "have those few words bound me to *him* forever?"

"They have, indeed, made you fully his wife, till death."

"Even though now, already, I know that I have made a great and horrible mistake—been cruelly deceived?"

"If that mistake does not include a living wife for him, or husband for you, to invalidate this morning's vow, then only a tedious, and terrible, a disgraceful divorce suit, Violet, can break the tie you have voluntarily assumed."

"Oh, why did I not take your advice? Why cannot I die? Oh, I wish—I wish," burst out Violet, wildly.

"Hush, my child. I only advised a little waiting. I know nothing against Lord Leigh. I believe he will be a good husband to you——"

"He shall not be my husband!" shrieked Violet. "I will not have him. My uncle shall keep me from him—my friends shall protect me."

"My darling, you are his wife; nothing can undo that. Only the highest court can divide you two, and that only for such cause as I know cannot be shown. Violet, whatever has changed your wish and hope, trample it under your feet, and be true to your wifely vow."

"Lady Burton," said Violet, "I have heard you were not happy in your first marriage."

"I married, as you have, very young, and I was very, very unhappy."

"And how long did it last?"

"For seven years God enabled me to bear my sorrows, in quiet and in faithfulness, till He sent release."

"And my mother, too, was an unhappy wife?"

"She was; but a dutiful and honorable wife, for twelve years."

"And women endure such things—such horrible *heart bitterness*, for so long, so long. Oh, it is cruel!"

"Violet, when all is lost except honor and doing duty, then the good woman lives for duty and honor."

"Lady Burton—I *hate him!*"

"Violet, cease such rash, wicked words."

"And I shall go on detesting him, forever!"

"Violet, in your mother's name, I command you to act as becomes an honorable woman. Whatever new light may have fallen on your marriage, or on Lord Leigh, remember you freely accepted him; in a public manner you have pledged your faith; the credit of the Ainslies, the Montresors, and the Leighs is in your keeping—hard or not, as your fate may be, all that remains for you is to meet it as a loyal, self-respecting woman. Banish such thoughts, bury such words as you have spoken to me. Do not give the

public reason to call you mad. If you make a display of these singular feelings, a blight will rest forever on your womanly name."

"There is a blight on my heart," sobbed Violet.

"Then bear it bravely in secret. I tell you, when all is lost except honor, one can and must live for honor."

Violet lay back exhausted. Dark circles were under her eyes; her lips were blanched; such a haggard look of woe and despair had fallen over the sweet girlish face that Lady Burton's heart ached for her.

She bent forward to bathe the girl's brow with fragrant waters, and as she did so a locket slipped from her bosom and fell against Violet's hand, opening as it fell.

Violet started suddenly, and cried:

"Lady Burton, who is this?"

"It is my son—Lord Kenneth Keith. It was taken several years ago."

"Your son?" said Violet; "and what is he like? Is he good?"

"Yes, I believe he is," said Lady Burton, returning to her corsage the picture of a youth handsome as Antinous.

"Like his father, your first husband?" queried Violet.

"God forbid," said Lady Burton.

"I can tell you what he is like," said Violet, fiercely; "false, false as Satan—like the rest of men."

CHAPTER V.

"YOU MUST TAKE THE CONSEQUENCES."

After this outburst Violet was quiet, while Lady Burton stood in pained silence. Then once again the lady took courage to speak.

"Violet, the years of your free, happy girlhood lie behind you. Your womanhood has begun. It has opened, I know not how, in tempest and misery. You have been the idol of your family, always indulged, petted. You have many virtues; but also, your life has made you something willful and jealous. Now, will you allow these traits to master you, to make you wretched and grave, until they perhaps make you criminal; or will you rise up nobly to do your duty, to trample temptations and your faults under foot,

and be a true, brave, noble, long-suffering woman? Remember, though we cannot always be happy, by God's help we can always be good."

Slowly Violet's contracted brow relaxed. She drew a deep breath. She looked at her friend; her beautiful eyes were full of tears.

"I can, I will be good," she said.

"God bless you," murmured Lady Burton, clasping the unhappy girl in her arms. "I know you will."

"I will tell you my trouble," said Violet, with a sob, "and I will be guided by you. You know I have always had a fear, a terrible fear, of marrying a fortune-hunter, of being married for my money, not for love. I accepted Lord Leigh, because I believed that he could not have any base motive in asking for my hand. Lady Burton, within this last hour I have found that I have married not only a man who takes me solely for my money, but he is doubly false in that he forsakes, for my money, one whom he loves."

"Violet!"

"I assure you it is true."

"Some cruel, officious, jealous scandal-monger has told you a falsehood. I do *not* believe this is true."

"Suppose it were true—what should I do then?"

"The only thing left you to do, my poor child, would be to act the part of a good wife—to try and win the love of your husband, and make him love and esteem you for the lovely qualities that he sees daily in you. You are still his wife, whether he married you for a good motive or a bad one; whether he loves another or yourself. Neither God nor man, for either plea, would release you from your marriage vow."

"It is done," said Violet, rising to her feet. "My heart is broken, my life is death, joy has passed into bitterness. I might have known that no one could love me for myself! It is not my fate. The only man who pretended to love me, not knowing I was an heiress, abandoned me without regret or explanation."

"Violet, what is this? You, child, so young, so guarded, had you ever a lover?"

"I thought I had," said Violet, forlornly; "but he amused himself with making love to me, and left me without a word. Since that was in him I am glad he went, for I loved him, Lady Burton, and I think it would be harder

to feel yourself deceived into marriage by one you love, yet who does not love you. I have only professed for Lord Leigh a liking that I hoped would grow to love under a good, disinterested man's affection. I am denied that; and now I must live as well as I can, with a wronged, lonely heart."

"Poor Violet, poor little girl!" cried Lady Burton, her heart overwhelmed with sorrow, as she kissed the pale, cold bride, whose life had grown so sad and dark. "Take courage," she whispered; "things will be easier and better than they seem."

"Never!" said Violet; "for this man, who does not love me, who has lied to me at the altar, I must leave the friends and relatives who in their way really love me; I must leave my hopes, my dreams that I have had, like other girls, and I must go even away from England alone with him. Oh, Lady Burton, can anything be more forlorn?"

"My dear child, consider that whatever you have heard—and I cannot conceive how you heard any such stories—may be untrue. Lord Leigh may be a good man, sadly misrepresented. Do not steel your heart against him who is now your protector, your nearest friend."

They heard Mrs. Ainslie's voice in the hall.

"There is my aunt coming to hurry me away," said Violet. "Oh, Lady Burton, is there a girl in England more desolate?"

She gathered all her strength of body and mind, and rose to go to her dressing-room. But a few steps made she returned and flung herself into Lady Burton's arms.

"Save me from my fate!"

"Believe me, your fate will be less hard than you anticipate. You exaggerate this, Violet. Courage, child!"

She moved again slowly; then stood still.

Lady Burton, with a sinking heart, seized her hand, and firmly led her to the dressing-room.

She stood there, speechless, pale, in despair rather than resignation—as Iphigenia preparing for sacrifice.

"You are lovelier than ever, darling," cried Grace Fanshaw, as she buttoned the last button of her pearl-gray gloves, and Violet stood in her gray traveling-dress.

A moment for final adieus; and then a dash across the city in a closed coach, and then, as in a mad, bad dream,

Violet was shut up with her husband in a reserved carriage and whirling along the railway to Dover.

CHAPTER VI.

“YOU MARRIED ME FOR MY MONEY.”

Certainly wedded life was not opening for this couple as for others. Lord Leigh, having paid every possible attention to his bride, and finding all unnoticed, withdrew into his own corner of the railroad coach and opened a book. His courtship and marriage had proceeded with a fortunate smoothness far beyond his hopes.

But what was this hostility, this mystery that assailed the first hours of his new life?

Next to the charming boudoir, where Mrs. Ainslie had taken Violet to wait for her bridegroom, was a room with a balcony curtained with honeysuckle and passion-flowers closely interwoven. This room had been made over for the day to the gentlemen of the guests, and some of them had taken possession of the balcony.

Seated there, in a closely woven bower of green and blossom, they could not see at all that a window was open just beside the balcony. But so there was, and in that window stood the waiting bride.

The only excuse for the careless talk of the men in the balcony was that they were very young, and as thoughtless as they were innocent of evil intention.

Just as Lady Leigh placed herself at the window to wait her bridegroom, these words fell on her ear:

“So rank, beauty, and money have run their race, and money has won the cup.”

In her happiness it never occurred to Violet that the words referred to her. She stood unprepared for what was to come.

Captain Gore had spoken. Sir Hugh Hunter took up the theme:

“First there was Lady Clare Montessor; then the vicar’s beautiful daughter, Miss Ambrose; and then—the Ainslie millions.”

“Why, man, you don’t mean our bride is not most lovely?”

"Certainly she is lovely—extremely lovely, charming, sweet; but Miss Ambrose is one of those beings beyond all praise. The most heavenly creature eye ever rested on. To see her once is to have her face photographed on your heart forever."

"Pooh, Hunter! you are romantic."

"So, so, perhaps. But I tell you it is impossible that a man who has loved Miss Ambrose can love another."

"No doubt Leigh did not love her then."

"Not? You may believe he did."

"Then, why, in the name of sense, did he give her up? Did she jilt him?"

"No; she loved him."

"Zounds! is the man so fickle?" said a third.

"Must be fickle. He was quite enamored of Lady Clare once."

"Attentive, not enamored. - Lady Clare is rather cold style, you know."

"So is Leigh. Has he been enthusiastic to-day, or the last month?"

"But that is just what I tell you; Miss Ambrose's image is in the background."

"That is all nonsense. If he wanted Miss Ambrose, and she loved him, it would have been a match. What vicar's daughter is going to refuse a lord of Leigh?"

"I explained at first. Beauty cannot hold its own with such a stunning lot of money. Two million pounds!"

"I admit it is a heavy sum, but Leigh did not need it. He of all men need not marry for money. He is rich."

"Yes," said Captain Gore's voice, "but he's dusedly hard up just now. I happen to know that he has a short loan of two hundred and fifty thousand pounds out, falling due immediately."

There was a general exclamation. Then, looking into the room, Captain Gore saw Sir Tom Churchill enter, and called him.

"Churchill, isn't it true that our handsome bridegroom has been rather crowded for cash of late?"

"What do I know about it?" said Churchill, angrily.

"How can you, Gore, be talking about the man's private affairs, with dozens of people within hearing?"

"'Pon my soul, I didn't think of that," said Captain Gore, good-naturedly. "However, only our own little

clique is here. I see the stories are so, Churchill—you don't deny he is hard up."

"Was, you mean," interrupted the third speaker; "now he is easy enough—two millions of pounds is a nice pot of reserve cash, by Jove! I wish I'd fallen into it."

Open to every terrible word, the sweet young bride had stood by that flower-curtained window powerless to move or to cry out. Life seemed to remain in her, only to pour upon her brain, through her ears, those hideous, shameful, agonizing, crushing truths.

He who had said he loved her preferred others to her, and had sought her only for her fortune. He who had seemed above reproach and suspicion was the embodiment of all that she most dreaded. He, to whom she had fled for refuge, from fortune-hunting, was the veriest fortune-hunter of them all. She had given her innocent heart, her quivering, sensitive soul, irrevocably to one who married her that he might pay an enormous bill.

It was then that Violet fell senseless to the floor. She heard those miserable truths—then she knew nothing until sight and knowledge returned, and bending nearest her, a look of ownership in his eyes, was the man who had so cruelly deceived her.

This scene, these thoughts, were still wretchedly repeating themselves when the train arrived at Dover, where, as they were too late for the boat, Lord Leigh had telegraphed for apartments, and found himself in possession of a magnificent suite of rooms, that had been used more than once by royalty.

The splendor of the apartments, the richness of the dress in which Kate had arrayed her, the choice supper set before her, could not distract the excited mind of Violet.

When she was left alone in the drawing-room with Lord Leigh she could not remain seated. In these hours of thought her anger had been rising. She moved uneasily up and down the room, and then stood by the hearth, her elbow resting on the low jade mantel and her head bent on her pink palm, as she looked at the dancing fire.

"Lady Leigh," said the bridegroom, suddenly, having gazed for some minutes at the lovely sad face, "will you

kindly tell me how you became so wise to-day as to change all your feelings toward me?"

Violet fixed her eyes on him, and said, slowly:

"I heard—that you married me for my money; I heard that you married me because you were deeply in debt; I heard that you were what I heartily detest, a fortune-hunter; I heard that you really loved—as much as you can love—another, but forsook her for my millions."

"And, Lady Leigh, on your marriage day, you have allowed a scandal-monger to pour these stories of your husband into your ears? You have lofty notions of a wife's duties!"

"Those things were said by your own friends, in a balcony next where I waited for you, and I could not help hearing them, as I am not deaf. *Are they true?*"

By an immense effort, Violet had forced herself to enough calmness for this explanation, for this heavy charge. Now she had reached high excitement. Her cheeks flamed, her eyes glowed.

But a look of relief came into Lord Leigh's face. He said:

"Even if all this were true, and it is not, I cannot see any great wrong to you in it, or anything that hinders me from being a good husband, and you a good and contented wife."

"It is a great and horrible wrong to marry a woman without loving her," sobbed Violet.

"I am not romantic, but I do love you, if you permit me to, and do not repulse me, as you have to-day. Suppose that your fortune was a factor in my consideration, and that, since I am thirty years old, I have admired other women? That does not injure you. No doubt you have fancied others, and had other considerations in marriage than especial love for me."

Violet flung herself on a sofa, and burst into an agony of weeping.

"Violet," inquired Lord Leigh, earnestly, "did you see any one? Did any one tell you anything else?"

"What so terrible was left to be told me?" cried Violet.

CHAPTER VII.

"TOO LATE FOR REMEDY."

For the first time in her life Violet was in Paris. To the child-wife, this was a new world. Its enchantments won her from herself and her sorrows. She was eager to see all that was to be seen. To Lord Leigh Paris was an old story; he had been there time and again. The only parts of Paris for which he now had toleration were the Bourse, where financial speculations were rife, and racing stables, and a club or two, where he met his countrymen.

For a few days he tried to do his duty, taking Violet about; but he wearied of the great museums of the Louvre, of his bride's ecstasy over pictures, and statuary, and jewelers' establishments. He felt that he might as well stop playing the attentive husband.

"What do you care, Violet, for seeing all these flowers?" he demanded. "If you want marbles, or pictures, why don't you buy the whole lot, and take them home to admire at your leisure?"

"You know I cannot buy these Murillos, and Vandykes, or the 'Feast of Cane,' which are the pride of France, nor the Venus of the Louvre—kings could not buy those treasures. But if it is a trouble to you to go out with me, pray do not go. I can stay at home."

"It is all nonsense to talk of staying at home," said Lord Leigh. "You have your carriage and your servants; you can go as you like. Take your maid and groom along. I admit I have no taste in either high art or horticulture. Why should a man be always following his wife, as if he feared to lose her? Your Montessor relations will be here soon, and you can go out with them."

Violet availed herself of her new liberty. Timidly at first, the young creature went out now with servants only.

In a few days the strangeness wore off. The novelty of her surroundings brightened her, for a large part of each day she forgot Lord Leigh and her unhappy marriage. In their brief courtship Lord Leigh had not grown into her life, nor taken hold on her affections. Her heart had

seemed to her so quiet that she believed it was empty. She did not know that love lay in it, fallen asleep in a long silence, but ready to awake. Her heart was like a fair and quiet room, where one enters and says it is tenantless, but where, instead, an occupant, hidden under draperies, lies in slumber, ready, at a footfall or a word, to rouse and come forth.

Leigh was polite, largely indulgent; all he asked was that his young countess should enjoy herself in her own way, and let him go his, understanding meanwhile, that neither of them should go particularly astray.

Violet, before her Montessor relatives came, had but few casual acquaintances in Paris, and sometimes, when in her drives and visits she had seen things, that stirred her heart, her young, enthusiastic nature would gush over into descriptions of these things, even to her unresponsive husband, as they were alone at table, or waiting in the gloaming to go to the opera.

"How can you be so excited over such things?" said Lord Leigh. "It takes much more to stir my blood. And I don't know as it is good form for you to go wandering about the Louvre, talking to artists, and then going to visit studios. I have my doubts about the tone of these fellows in velvet coats. It is a pity your Aunt Montessor would not come over here soon, to go out with you. And Lady Clare; you should model yourself on Lady Clare, Violet. She is very good style."

Violet's pride took fire. She had been the petted darling of her kindred, and never told to model herself on any one. And Lady Clare, too! She had heard Lord Leigh's name connected with that of Lady Clare. Her jealousy awoke.

"I don't like Lady Clare's style," she said; "nor do I like Lady Clare. We have never been intimate. She is five years older than I am. I am aware you like her style. I have heard you spoken of as her admirer."

"So I was—at one time," said Leigh, coolly.

"Why did you not marry her, then? Would she not have you?" demanded Violet, in her wrath.

"Oh, she would have had me, fast enough," said Leigh, in his confident tone. "Lady Clare is looking for a *parti*, and she knows she has neither fortune nor beauty. But she has high birth, and a stately, haughty style that I like."

"Well, then, why give her up?" insisted foolish Violet.

"Oh, I heard what a golden apple hung in that garden of Hesperides—the Ainslie nursery—and I waited."

Violet was deeply stung. She was pursuing a conversation which it would have been wisdom never to have begun. But she was young and inexperienced, and her heart had been cruelly wounded in her marriage. She longed to return blow for blow. But what could she say? Unhappily, she had a taunt ready.

"And while you waited for the Ainslie Hesperides to open its gates, you went up into the country and made love to the vicar's daughter."

Lord Leigh sprang to his feet. His face grew white.

"Lady Leigh, how came you to such intimate knowledge of my past?"

"It is knowledge, then?" said Violet, quietly. "I am wiser in your past than you supposed."

"Well, then, having all this wisdom, why marry me, and at once regret it?"

"I did not know it until two hours after I had been so unhappy as to go with you to the altar."

Leigh controlled himself with an effort.

"At least," he said, "the very worst there is to know of me is nothing so very bad. My record, whatever you may think, is not so bad as that of many men. You have nothing much to complain of."

"Did you not marry me for my fortune?"

"Yes, I did. And I claim that it is just as lawful a ground for marriage as beauty or blood."

"Marriage should be made solely for love," said Violet.

"I am not romantic. Did you love me, pray?"

"I expected to, some time."

"And I expected, and do expect, to make you an amiable husband, and give you no cause for complaint. I wish no quarrels, and no recriminations. I shall not find fault readily, and you need not. My conduct is good enough!"

"But did you not have a great debt? And my uncle says men only get into debt by being knaves or fools."

"Your uncle is an oracle. Once for all, let me tell you that my debt came chiefly by speculating. I speculated with Tom Churchill's property, expecting to make a great thing of it. I lost his funds, and as I am no rascal, I replaced them by a huge mortgage on my estates. That

mortgage falling due next month, I needed an heiress to rehabilitate the lands of Leigh, which, more than all else, I love. My ancestors built up our home by marrying birth and title. I have saved it by marrying millions. Am I worse than they? The Ainslie fortune will build up an ancient estate, which your children will inherit. Why complain of that?"

Violet hung her head. She felt ashamed at having opened this mercenary subject. In matrimonial battles with this hard and selfish heart, she must be worsted. Oh, to have grace always to endure in silence, to live only for duty.

"I was wrong to bring this up, since it is too late for remedy," she said, with a sigh.

"So I think," said Lord Leigh, calmly.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LOST LOVE.

It was a June afternoon, and a crowd of sight-seers surged in and out the famous palace of the Louvre. Among them, alone, went a sweet, youthful figure, followed by curious and admiring glances as she passed along, solely intent on the art treasures about her.

Finally she came to the place she liked the best, the temple-like rotunda, lit from above, and lined with deep crimson, where alone in all her matchless beauty stands the "conquering Venus" of the Louvre.

Violet sat on the sofa placed at a little distance in front of the figure, and her eyes sought the triumphant face, the form so strong, so gracious, so dignified, yet all tenderness and enchantment.

The palace of the Louvre, with its treasure-filled corridors and galleries, died away from her consciousness.

She went back to the dawn of her girlhood—to her Lincolnshire home, when at fifteen she lived there with her stern old grandmother, her elderly romance-repressing governess, and her maid. How sedulously all poetry, romance, novels, had been shut out of her young life—she had been reared among all those elderly people as a young vestal.

And yet, there romance and new-blown passion, the dawn

of heart-life, had come to her; love had risen as a new day that dawns rosily in the east, and love had paled and perished, as when thick mists enwrap and veil that new-born day.

Never, since the first period of that love and loss, had Violet recalled so clearly those hours in Lincolnshire, as this day, sitting alone before the Venus of the Louvre.

Marriage with its trembling hopes, its bitter, crushing disappointments, had sharpened all her perceptions and intensified all her emotions. That terrible, yet often blessed capacity for loving, which Lady Burton said was hers, was awake now in full force, and, alas, had in her husband no object.

No wretch drifting shipwrecked on desolate seas, no trembler on the limit of a precipice, no victim of fell disease, quivering on the verge of death, was that hour in more instant and terrible peril than Violet, Countess of Leigh, sitting in the palace of the Louvre, and dutifully watched, from a distance, by a maid and a groom. Her peril was from her own heart.

She saw that dark, bird-haunted, fern-carpeted wood, stretching around the grange. Wandering there alone one laughing summer day, herself fair as a young Hebe, she had come upon a beautiful Antinous sleeping in the wood. She had almost trodden on him as he lay asleep, his hands under his comely head, his curls damp with the dews of slumber, his throat stirred by each deep, healthy inspiration, as he lay in a bed of aromatic fern. She had stopped, held her breath, and gazed as one spell-bound by the beauty of a young god. Awe at first of a strange presence. Then, grown more familiar, curiosity. What color were his eyes? What would be the tones of his voice? She was young, and she had scarcely seen young creatures of her own rank, near her age, certainly almost none of what her grandmother deemed a dangerous sex. And she had looked and wondered, until the exuberant child-spirit mastered her; for childhood had hardly as yet yielded its place to girlhood in her soul, and, intent on mischief, leaning forward, with a long spray of grass, softly pulled from among the fern, she had touched the sleeper's lips. Then his eyes had opened, eyes like heaven's own blue.

The acquaintance, began in mischief and merriment, passed quickly into love. Like two happy children, Violet

and the young Oxonian wandered in the woods, and by the summer streams, and for six weeks were entirely happy in each other's society.

Kate Gray, Violet's maid, had a young woman's sympathy for a pair of beautiful young lovers, and she felt great pity for the repressed and lonely life of her dear little mistress.

Kate was present at all the meetings, a convenient third, deaf to all soft words of love, and blind to each stolen caress. Kate carried the numerous letters that were a necessity, even though the lovers met twice each day.

But the hour came when the young student must go back to his studies. With tears and lingering embraces the youthful pair parted, promising daily letters and undying faithfulness. They parted, and utter silence fell between them.

Since that hour Violet had neither seen nor heard of her handsome adorer. He had been false; she said that he had seen in her only the simple little Lincolnshire girl, and had amused himself, and then forgotten her.

As the young and lonely bride recalled all these bitter-sweet experiences, her brown eyes fell from the marble Venus, and were fastened dreamily on the floor.

Presently she gave that start which so often comes to the object of fixed attention.

She sprang up, feeling that she had been for hours, yes, for ages, on that sofa in the little rotunda.

Turning, she lifted her gaze, and her eyes met once again those same dark-blue, ardent eyes which had met hers in the Lincolnshire woods. The lover of her girlhood was before her once more.

One instant a deadly pallor spread over her face, her parasol fell from her hand, and she caught at the back of the sofa for support. Then, as with an exclamation, the young man sprang forward and stooped for the ivory and silken toy which she had dropped; the blood surged over her throat and face, and she felt as if he had not only been watching her, but had read her thoughts—read all those tender reminiscences of him—the traitor.

Where was her pride? Could she show that she had remembered, while he had forgotten? Never! never!

He held out the parasol, and also his right hand to clasp hers. He cried:

"Violet!"

She took the parasol, but ignored the other extended hand.

"Thanks," she said, as to a stranger.

Then suddenly a group of bustling sight-seers crowded into the rotunda with exclamations and questions, and Violet and her love of other days fell apart.

With trembling, impetuous steps, which she longed to render firm and dignified, Violet hastened along the gallery to her waiting servants, and then to her carriage.

Surely this was the irony of fate—that she should meet him again just as she had learned that love was living for him yet—that she should meet him when love would be a crime, and therefore an impossibility.

"But it is better so," said Violet to herself. "If he had found me three months ago, he, too, might have courted me for my money, and won me by deceit; and to be deceived by him would surely be the most bitter thing on earth."

Receiving no orders, the coachman drove slowly along the Bois de Boulogne, but all during the drive, and at the opera that evening Violet was striving to find a grave wide and deep enough in her heart to bury her lost love.

The next afternoon the Montessor barouche was drawn up at the Hotel Splendide, waiting for the Countess of Leigh to join her Aunt Montessor and Lady Clare. Under the arcade, a few paces from the carriage, stood a handsome young man, looking idly about. Lord Leigh, turning from the carriage-steps, saw him, and went to him with extended hand.

"Well met, Keith. Glad to see you again."

Keith was just returning this greeting when Violet came down the hotel steps, preceded by a footman carrying her parasol and wrap, and followed by her maid, holding her mistress' little gold-mounted caba. Violet took her place beside the Countess Montessor, her aunt, and engaged by her greetings, saw neither Lord Keith nor her husband.

"There is Miss Violet Ainslie," cried Lord Keith; "what a surprise to find her in Paris. I wonder where she is staying?"

"Acquainted?"

"Long ago. She was then the most captivating child, as now she has bloomed into the loveliest of women."

"I think I can accommodate you with her address," said Lord Leigh, "Suite 47, this hotel."

"Oh, thanks. Staying with the Montressors? I will call."

Lord Leigh laughed, but gave no explanation.

CHAPTER IX.

"LEAVE ME! I HATE YOU!"

The next morning, as early as calls would be in order, Lord Kenneth Keith with eager steps went up the marble stairs of the Hotel Splendide, and hurried to the reception-room of suite 47. The door was opened by Kate Gray herself. Kate, the very Kate who had been his friend in need in that six weeks, the elysium of his life! Lord Keith was so delighted that he frankly held out his hand.

"Why, Kate, my good girl, it seems natural to see you; and you are still with your little mistress?"

"Oh, I could never leave Miss Violet," said Kate, who fell, by habit, into the name used for ten years, since her "Miss Violet" was a mere child.

"That's right; there is nothing like faithfulness," said Lord Keith. "I hope your mistress is at home? I came to call on her."

"I will speak to her," said Kate, and Lord Keith was left alone.

His heart was in a tumult of expectation and apprehension. When he had seen Violet at the Louvre, he wondered if she was the Violet Ainslie whose image had for nearly four years been cherished in his heart. Their eyes met. It was surely she; but, oh, more altered in manner than in face! The timid, tender, changeful Violet had grown cold, careless, had pretended to have forgotten him. Then when he had seen her enter the carriage, the previous day, in spite of the sumptuous dress, so different from the simple garb of his little love, he had felt that she was the same Violet still. There was something pathetic in the brown eyes, in the droop of the corners of the lovely mouth, a shrinking childish grace in the little figure, so ostentatiously surrounded by riches and servants. All his early tenderness rushed back upon his soul, he was resolved to see her,

to challenge this long silence. Pride should not divide him from the love of his heart, without at least one honest struggle. He had come, therefore, to discover why the Violet so tenderly his in the past, was not his Violet still?

When Kate went to summon her lady, Lord Keith sat down in the embrasure of a window, and recalled, as he had done hundreds of times, in hundreds of places, the image of his girl-love. Once more he saw her, with her innocent smile, light step, eager eyes, coming through the shadowy woods to meet him, while Kate, with work or book, came behind, apparently oblivious of the fact that her little lady expected to greet a friend. How the small, soft hand had fluttered in his, like a bird caught in a net, how the shy blushes had come and gone on the dimpled cheek, how honest in their tenderness had been the wide brown eyes.

A soft stir of drapery woke him from his dream. It was a portiere falling into place, and against the deep maroon velvet stood Violet—Violet, no dream, but flesh and blood, Violet so like the love of the past!

All the love of those vanished years rolled back on his heart and flashed into his eyes as he saw her. He could not, he would not, be robbed of her. She was no longer a child, wax in the hands of relatives and guardians, but woman grown, and by her woman's heart she should be guided. What answer would that heart make to him, her lover?

He sprang toward her; such a ceremonious greeting as he had contemplated since their cold meeting in the Louvre was forgotten. He held out both his arms, that would so gladly infold her, and cried:

“Oh, Violet. Oh, my darling, do I see you at last?”

But, with a low cry, Violet evaded him. There was a great arm-chair near her, and instinctively she placed herself behind it, as a sheltering barrier. She turned on him eyes of intense reproach, and said, in a voice of agony:

“How dare you? how dare you?”

“I dare, because I love,” said Kenneth Keith, boldly, coming as near her as he could, and so standing with the great chair between them, on which the plush-cushioned back of which Violet folded her arms for support, as she trembled so she could scarcely stand.

“You love!” she said, with anger and scorn. “This is a strange time to tell me you love—after all these years!”

“They are years, indeed, and long years,” said Keith, in

a broken voice; "but in them all I have loved you still. Love for another has never entered my soul. What has changed you? Was it true, then, that your love for me passed as a cloud in a summer sky? Was it true that you were too young for permanent love, and forgot it in a day?"

"*You* ask me such questions?" said Violet, panting. "*You*, who went away and forgot me? You, who promised to write to me, and never wrote one word, while I waited and believed in you until I learned, too late, that my grandmother's warnings were true, and that all men are deceivers? You thought I was only a little lonely orphan, to be flirted with for a vacation time, and then forgotten."

"Never, never!" cried Keith. "I loved you with all my soul; I do still. And I know you loved me, and your eyes, although you are angry now, show that you have not forgotten, and you love me yet."

"No, no; I do not. It is false; I will not."

"But you must. Love will not be denied in your heart; love is imperial, and I am true. What do you mean by saying I never wrote you? I wrote you again and again—daily."

"No, you did not. Kate went to the address we had arranged, and there was never one letter there. You said you loved me, and you did not. That is my fate—always to be made a toy, and deceived by pretenses of love. Leave me. I hate you."

"Hate me? and for what, Violet?"

"For deceiving me. You deceived me by your false name. Did you not call yourself Kenneth Howard, and you were Kenneth Keith? Did you not deceive me by saying you loved me, when you did not, and by promising to write and always be true, when you did not, and now, by saying you wrote, when you never wrote at all? You have no right to speak to me in this way. It is wicked."

"It is not wicked to tell the truth," said Keith, stoutly. "My name is Kenneth Howard, Lord Keith. Until I was of age, all my college friends called me Howard oftener than Keith. It was the name I preferred. I did love you; I do love you. And I did write. I wrote again and again. Then, I had a letter from your grandmother, forbidding me to write any more. She said it was all childish folly, already forgotten by you; that you declined any further acquaintance."

"I did not," returned Violet, vehemently. "I never spoke to my grandmother of you, nor she of you to me. I never said that."

"It is clear, then, to me," said Keith, "that your grandmother had found out our acquaintance, and seized our letters. She did not wish you to have a lover, perhaps."

"She wished me never to marry, so that my hateful money could go back to the Ainslie family," said Violet, with a passionate burst of tears. "Oh, cruel woman!"

"It was cruel! She has given us almost four sad years. But they are gone. I find you again. Oh, Violet, now you know that I have been true; that I loved you then, and now will you not cast out your suspicions, and take back that bitter word *hate*, and love me as once you did?"

"Stop! stop! How dare you say such words to me. Oh, Kenneth, have you only insult for me? How can you come to me to talk of love, now it is too late, *now I am married!*"

"Married, Violet! my Violet!" cried Keith, wildly.

"Yes! yes!" sobbed Violet. "Married. Did you not know?"

"Heaven help me, I did not know! I have had no English news. I am just from the East. Married! Oh, Violet, say it is not so! Do not doom me to despair!"

"I have been married over two weeks," moaned Violet.

"And to whom?" gasped Keith.

"To Lord Norman Leigh."

Kenneth Keith gave a deep groan. Then he flamed into fury. He exclaimed, passionately:

"Then you were the false one; you were the one who forgot; you betrayed the love you promised me. Oh, fickle, false, and shallow heart! Why have I ventured all my love on you? And you love another!"

"I do not love him. I never can love him," cried Violet, "but I can and must be true to him and myself. Go, Kenneth; go away now, and forget me, that is all I ask of you. Go!"

And, with a white, quivering face, Violet turned, darted under the portiere, and left Lord Kenneth Keith alone in his misery.

CHAPTER X.

"OH, MADLY HAD SHE SOWED, BITTERLY TO REAP."

"What, not going to the opera?" cried Lord Leigh, entering the darkened room where Violet had been lying since the hour when she fled from the presence of Kenneth Keith.

"Kate says you are ill of a headache. What a horrid bore."

He had come back to dinner, Violet, as usual, having been left to herself for the day.

"Do you often have those headaches? It will be a great plague. I counted on your going to the Italian opera to-night. I promised Lady Clare Montessor we would meet her there."

"I do not expect to hinder your going; and I cannot help having the headache," said Violet, gloomily.

"Why, yes, you can. Why do you give way to it? If you lie all day in this dark, amber-scented room, no wonder you have headache. You should go out the first minute you feel it; go ride, visit, shake it off. Been alone here all day? No callers?"

"Yes; Lord Kenneth Keith called."

"Did he, though? Wasn't he surprised to find you married? Zounds, I wish I'd been here to see it."

"Why should he be surprised?" asked Violet.

"He saw you getting into the carriage yesterday, and spoke of you as Miss Ainslie; wished he had your address, and I promptly accommodated him, and never told him you were Lady Leigh," and Lord Leigh gave his own silent laugh over his "good joke."

"Then it was to you I was indebted for his call," said Violet, fire in her heart as she thought of the agony of that morning scene.

"Oh, he would have called any way. Do you know he is a great admirer of yours? Said he knew you when you were a charming little girl, or something like that."

"But how did you know him?" asked Violet.

"We were in Oxford together. He was several years younger, and not exactly in our set. He was of the heavy

readers—always pegging at his books. We fellows gave them the title of 'L.L. without the D.'"

"What did that mean?"

"Literary Lord, to be sure. Poetic sort of a fellow, Keith. Fond of incognito—didn't like to be called by his title; loved to wander off into the country for vacations. We suspected a love affair for him, four years ago this next fall, just after I left there; but Tom Churchill told me Keith went away for six or seven weeks somewhere in Lincolnshire, or some other place, and when he came back he was in a state of sublime joy—more poetic than ever—had a cabinet picture which he kept in a locked case, and a miniature which no one saw, but which he was detected in taking from his breast-pocket and looking at adoringly, in solitary moments. All that sort of nonsense, you know. Keith is just the man to nourish a grand passion. Then he began to be melancholy, pale, thin—went off his feed," explained Leigh, as if the absent Keith were a horse; "seemed all broken up, and the story was, he was jilted. Though what girl in her wits would jilt Keith, I don't know—no end of money, and an old title. What do girls want?"

Thus Violet Leigh heard from her husband the history of her first love.

The narrator fell into silence.

"And then?" said Violet, breathlessly.

"Then? You are interested. But, yes—you, too, are a bit romantic; you'll outgrow it. Then Keith seemed not to find his life any good to him; but he pegged away and finished his examinations, and took honors, and went off through Europe, to Egypt, India, and now he is coming back, cured, of course. All men get cured of love, first or last, as they do of measles. So you are not coming to dinner? If I'd known I'd have staid at the club. It's poor amusement eating alone. I say, Violet, don't have headache again; but if you do, let me know in time, and I'll not come home to dinner. Good-night; hope I'll see you well in the morning. Have you all you want?"

"Yes; good-night," sighed Violet.

She had by no means what she wanted. The sad and lonely little heart wanted comfort, sympathy, tenderness, a love to surround it as an atmosphere; but what she needed and craved she could never have. It was idle

to think of it. The desire would not even be comprehended.

When Lord Leigh left her, Violet had new food for thought. Not merely her own woes absorbed her. She had been given a glimpse of Kenneth's grief when he thought she had forgotten him.

Oh, cruel grandmother, who had so ruthlessly crushed two young hearts. And why had not she been more trustful? Why had she believed her true love fickle? Why had not she herself been true and waited—waited years longer, if need be, until they two met again, as meet they must. The world is not so wide as to divide two loving hearts forever.

How could she have assigned baseness to that clear-eyed, honest lover? Oh, madly had she sowed, and bitterly was she reaping for herself and for him.

If her heart was broken, then his was broken, too.

Then she began to think what sweetness there would have been in life if she had again met Kenneth, when she was happy and unfettered, when explanations could be fully given and received, and love could answer love.

But she woke with a start from these fancies, remembering that it was now her part to forget Keith entirely and forever, unless these two could securely pass into the most quiet friendship.

Could they do that?

Then her mind reverted to Lord Leigh. If cold, he was not suspicious. His entire lack of feeling or suspicion, his careless trust in sending Keith to see her, called Violet to complete faithfulness to him in thought, as well as in deed. Trust, whether rooted in carelessness, or in lovingness, should not be betrayed.

And what made Leigh so careless? Was it that he had no idea at all of love, or merely that in his marriage he had no love? Did she touch him least of all women? Had he ever thought he loved Clare Montessor, and had he been wiled from Clare by that lovely face, that had neither rank nor fortune for its dower, and whom, as she had heard that fatal voice say, to love once was to love forever? Would Leigh ever meet Miss Ambrose, and would they also sorrow and part, as she and Kenneth had?

At least, Lord Leigh was kind, polite, indulgent, seemed to wish her to enjoy herself, Enjoy! What idle

talk. She never could be happy or enjoy anything ever again.

Next morning Leigh sent to inquire if Lady Leigh was better and intended to appear at breakfast.

Violet returned word that she would breakfast with him.

Norman Leigh, as the graceful, slender figure in white pique and cherry ribbons entered the sunny little breakfast-room, realized that his wife was very sweet and attractive. A silent, shy, flying creature she had been, even in the blaze of the ball-rooms or the glitter of opera-houses. But now, as he watched the play of varying emotions on that strangely mobile face, the sun and shadow drifting over the brown, changeful eyes, he felt the charm of her winsomeness.

This was, no doubt, a very attractive being whom he shortly would take to the home of his ancestors. He kissed her hand, and asked after her health with more interest than he had ever before shown.

"You need a little excursion to set you up," he said. "If you like I will take you to Chantilly, and we will row about the Courmelle Lakes. I don't mind trips where I can do anything, and I believe I'd like to pull an oar."

"Thanks," said Violet, eagerly.

She longed to get away from Paris, even for a day—to fly the air breathed by Keith. Suppose he should come again and load her with reproaches for her unfaithfulness and ready suspicion?

They went to Chantilly, and Leigh got his boat and pulled his oar. Looking up in the midst of this delightful exercise, he caught Violet's eyes bent on him, with a singular expression—wistful, pained, reproachful, pitiful, like a wronged child.

"I say, Violet," he exclaimed, "I don't think you had a very lively bringing up, and it makes you moody. You must go about more. Wasn't it dused dull down there in Lincolnshire?"

"I liked it; I knew nothing else," said Violet.

"And what did your grim old grandmother talk about?"

"Mostly warning me never to marry, as people would only follow me and marry me for my money, not myself."

"They might have said that if you were an ogress. I say it was very stupid talk, fit to make you suspicious."

"It was all their talk," cried Violet, defiantly. "Uncle Henry was always telling of the dangers of an heiress, and aunt always giving me my way, openly, because of my money. I grew to fear and hate it. I felt like a fine-plumed bird, sure to be shot for its feathers. Wretched little chippy birds are far better off, I think. I hate money."

"Tut!" said Leigh. "Come down to real facts, and money is the great solid good, after all. Now you are married, you might as well drop all that nonsense and take things easy, and we'll get on very well. Seems to me you are very much of a child. You lack experience."

He recognized something of her sweet, subtle fascination, but he felt that though grown to woman's height, she was only a child, sweet, but timid, reserved, passionless as lilies are.

CHAPTER XI.

"OUR LIVES HAVE BEEN RUINED BY A LIE."

After a few days Violet lost her terror lest Keith should come to her again and reproach her, echoing the ceaseless reproaches of her own heart. And, as she neither saw nor heard anything of him, she began to wonder where he was, and if he was very miserable. She thought she would like to ask his pardon, to console him, to touch his hand in kindness, and say they would part as friends.

There is a beautiful painting, representing a little daintily dressed child standing gazing at a mummy case, wherein a dead Pharaoh had slept for two thousand years. A similar bringing together of the living and the dead, of the warm life of the nineteenth century, and that which has been death and silence for ages, might have been seen on a June morning in Pere la Chaise cemetery.

Violet Leigh was standing beside the great, dark tomb of Abelard and Heloise. Never had Violet looked more girlish, more guileless, more sweet, than in that shadow of the tomb of the long dead lovers.

Her little hand, in its pale kid glove, rested on the dark stone, her delicate lace hat, with its clustered tea-roses, was bowed near those grim images of death. Not a bird was

singing nor a step was heard in the great cemetery, and in the sudden hush Violet seemed the only living thing.

No one else was in sight; the groom and maid had lingered in a broader sunlight.

Violet sighed. As an echo of her sigh a voice fell on her ear:

“Violet—Lady Leigh!”

It was Kenneth Keith.

She turned to him, and her eyes were full of tears.

“I am afraid I startle you—that I disturb you,” he said.

“No,” replied Violet, simply. “I wanted to see you. Let us sit down on that bench. I was thinking that all one’s troubles seem short, when they are looked back on, and that people should have courage to endure anything, when they consider that it will not last forever. I have made you unhappy by not trusting you, by thinking that you had forgotten me, and were untrue to all you had said. If I had only waited on and on, in trust, until we met, then we—you—might have been happy. But, you see, I had heard so much of how false and forgetful people were, I thought you were, too—and that explains me.”

This ingenuous, child-like, if stumbling confession, went straight to Lord Keith’s heart, and aroused all his chivalrous tenderness for this sweet young creature.

“It was not your fault,” he said. “We have both been victims of very unhappy circumstances. If you will hear me, I would like to tell you my share of our trouble in a few words.”

Violet dropped her eyes; she did not speak, but her listening attitude consented.

“When I met you in Lincolnshire and loved you, I did not know that you were the greatest heiress of England. I only knew that you embodied my ideal—were all the hope, joy, poetry of my life, in one fair form. When I returned to Oxford I wrote, as we had agreed, again and again. But, at the same time, I began to feel that all this manner of concealment of our love and correspondence was wrong. My chief wish was to marry you as soon as you were of age to marry, and I saw that it was only honorable and right to make my intentions known. Meanwhile I had no word from you, and I became miserably unhappy. My tutor was my cousin, a young curate, who now has the living at Keith Castle. He was always my best friend, and seeing that I

was unhappy he asked my confidence, and I told him my story. He at once recognized you as the heiress of the Ainslies, and he charged me to have done with all subterfuge, and write you boldly, to your grandmother's care, and be prepared to explain to her my hopes and intentions. I did so, and speedily received my letter to you, returned, with one from your grandmother, declaring you already ashamed of our folly, and amusing yourself 'with playing love with some other lad.' She also declared that 'with your full consent' arrangements for your future life had already been made by your family.

"I wrote her a passionate letter, telling my love and my despair, and begging leave to come and plead my cause with you both, as I believed that you really loved me. She wrote back, accusing me of fortune-hunting and deceitfulness, and forbidding me to come to her home or again address any one under her roof; conveyed me your farewells, saying that you 'were sorry I cared for you, as you were only making believe.' I tried to bury my unhappiness in books, in hard study, then in travel. My mother thought my melancholy came from too hard work. I told no one but my cousin of my trouble, and, taking refuge in my pride, I fell into silence and absence as a last means of forgetting. But I have never forgotten you, Violet. I came back from the East resolved to find you, and try again to win your love. And I see you—when it is forever too late."

Violet was sobbing bitterly.

Keith's voice was broken with emotion.

"Oh, cruel, wicked woman, how could she be so false to us both?" cried Violet. "I thought she loved me, and I loved her; but now I see that just as she never loved my mother, so she never loved me, and she only cared for my property to keep it in the Ainslie family."

"And you did not get my letters, nor send such messages?" demanded Keith.

"No, no; how could I? I loved you."

"Our lives have been ruined by a lie," cried Keith.

"I waited and waited to hear from you," said Violet.

"I was so wretched I could scarcely live. Then I was roused up by that sudden death of my grandmother. She was found dead in her bed. Hers was the only home and care that I remembered. After that excitement, I

was taken to my uncle's. I could hardly tell, then, which part of my sorrow was for loss of my grandmother, for she had always been very kind, only in that one thing, which I did not know, and which part was misery because you had forsaken me. I know it was a very dark, gloomy year, and people said I mourned my grandmother very deeply. By and by I began to brighten. I had so many pleasant things and kind friends, and I determined never to think of you more. I brought all my pride up to disdain your desertion. I made up my mind never to marry, for since you were false, all men must be false."

"Oh, if you had only adhered to that resolve till you saw me, all would have gone well!" groaned Kenneth Keith.

"They urged me so," said Violet, humbly. "Uncle Henry complained of the care and responsibility of my fortune, and Aunt Ainslie was always worrying about the care of guarding me, and about fortune-hunters, and hinting that I should make a proper marriage for the sake of the girls, and that I would be in their way when they came out. Finally they worried me into accepting Lord Leigh, after he had offered himself four or five times."

This recalled the honest-hearted Keith to a realization of their mutual relations. He said, with a start:

"Violet, it is done. Our lives have been settled for us; not as we would have them, but as we must bear them. I hope Lord Leigh will make you as happy as you deserve."

"I do not deserve anything but misery, since I was so hasty in distrust, and allowed myself to be talked into marriage. I did not know until I married how wild and wicked that was. But I shall not be happy. Lord Leigh does not love me. I found, only two hours after my marriage, that he only married me for my fortune, and loved some one else."

Lord Keith started. But the utter innocence and simplicity of Violet's avowals roused all his manhood. The fate of a woman whom he passionately loved was at stake. He must help her.

"Violet," he said, gently, "you may be misjudging Leigh as you misjudged me. You have, perhaps, been trained to be suspicious. Do not make up your mind to be unhappy. No man could see you daily and not love you. Leigh must love you. Try, try and be happy, my dear. I speak as a friend."

"And will you be my friend?" said Violet, earnestly, lifting her guileless brown eyes, drowned in tears, to his face. "I should like to feel you do not hate and despise me."

"Oh, Violet, how could I hate and despise you?"

"Easily. I hate and despise myself. I do not expect to be happy; but I know it is always open to me to be good and do good, and I mean to live for that."

"Yes, yes; and then you will grow into content and happiness."

"And if you think you could be my friend. If that would make you more happy. I have read of great friends, and my grandmother had a very dear friend—old Count Solis, a refugee. I used to be so happy talking with you! You remember, we liked the same things—books, flowers, pictures, music, all beautiful things; and Lord Leigh does not care in the least for any of them. You shall be my friend, as Count Solis was my grandmother's, and I'll try to be a little happy with that."

Poor Violet! She did not realize the vast difference between her grandmother's stern temperament and dignified age and her own ardent, inexperienced youth; between Count Solis' whitened locks and Kenneth Keith's head, ringed with sunny curls.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE EVIL GENIUS OF YOUR LIFE."

The various museums of Paris, with their collections of treasures, were very attractive to the beauty-loving Violet, who had traveled so little. Left to herself for the greater part of her days, she went from one point of interest to another, trying to forget her sorrows by occupying her mind. She was one day standing before some exquisite examples of oriental embroidery, when a lady, drawing near to look at the same specimens, said, in a friendly tone:

"Very beautiful are they not?"

"Lovely!" cried Violet; "how charming it must be to do such work one's self. Whenever I buy any, I always think how much more I should enjoy it, if I made it,"

"You are fond of doing fancy work?"

"Very; but I know how to do but little."

"Why do you not learn this kind, if you like it?"

"I thought it was only done by those wonderful people in the far East. Yes, I should like it. I have a deal of time on my hands, and I do not enjoy doing nothing. I like to be employed. I cannot sit hours at the piano, making music for myself alone; and I have but little genius for painting or drawing."

"If you wish to learn this oriental work, and will accept instruction, I shall be glad to teach you. I am now in Paris, making my living by giving lessons. I have been a governess for some years in England. Shall I send you my recommendations? If you wish lessons, it would really be a favor to me to learn of me. I suppose it seems odd to a person in your circumstances, that any one should be anxious to earn a few pounds!"

"Oh, I should like to learn, indeed I should!" cried Violet, her benevolent nature aroused by this half appeal from a woman but a few years older than herself, and exceedingly lady-like in speech and appearance.

"Would you come to my hotel, and teach me?"

"With pleasure."

"There is my card. Come to-morrow about eleven o'clock. Will you bring all the material? I should not know what to get. How many lessons will I need? I shall not be here more than a fortnight longer."

"Six or eight will be enough for a person of taste. You will learn readily. Which of the styles do you prefer?"

After a little more chat they parted, Violet already feeling an interest in the stranger.

The next day Lord Leigh had gone out immediately after their ten o'clock breakfast, and Violet did not expect to see him again until evening.

Shortly after eleven she was seated in her boudoir, with her new acquaintance, busily at work over an embroidery frame, when Lord Leigh hastily entered. He stopped abruptly, and his face darkened as his eyes fell on the embroidery teacher, who after one swift look kept her glance fixed on her patterns.

"Lady Leigh, I wish to speak to you. I have come for you." He swept back the portiere with his arm for Violet to pass into the adjoining bedroom. Then he closed the door, and said, hurriedly: "I wish you to get ready quickly

to go to Sevres, to stay until to-morrow evening. You will wish to make some purchases there. Lady Clare and her friend will accompany us. Make haste, please."

He had his eyes fixed scrutinizingly on her.

"Very well; I will go and speak to this lady, who is teaching me a new embroidery."

"Pshaw! No; send Kate. Kate, go tell that person that your lady is engaged; she is going from Paris on a trip. Now, Violet, make ready. Where are your things? Wear that navy-blue silk, and the hat with the pink ostrich tips, as you did yesterday. I like that combination. It gives you style. Why do you not look up your things?"

"Kate will do that. I don't know anything about it. I will be ready by the time you have made your own preparations," said Violet, quietly.

"Here, Kate," cried Lord Leigh to the returning maid. "Get your lady ready as speedily as you can, and then do you put up what things she needs, and come out to Sevres with Thomas this evening."

After this order Lord Leigh withdrew, but instead of going to his dressing-room, he paced up and down before his wife's door, as one on guard.

Violet was a little irritated by such a summary dismissal of her instructress and disposition of her time. She was accustomed to be consulted with deference. If her friends had had views and plans different from her own, they had thwarted her in secret, as her grandmother had done, and only long after she had become aware of it. Usually Violet was the little autocrat of the household. And now this man, who had only law and not love to support his claim, ordered her about as if he were her master. Still the matter was a trifle, and she told herself that she must learn to endure adverse trifles pleasantly.

She did not keep Lord Leigh waiting long, and he gave her his arm to go down stairs, and glanced about as if warning off intruders, as the groom threw open the door of the barouche.

But once in the carriage, his gathering wrath broke forth. His tone was low, but concentrated indignation.

"Violet, where did you pick up that person who was in your boudoir?"

"It is a lady named Miss Hope. She is an English gov-

erness; but just now she gives lessons in fancy work, and I engaged her to teach me embroidery."

"And where did you pick her up?"

"I met her at the museum yesterday."

"I declare, if you are a married woman, you need a chaperon as much as if you were a chit of fifteen, just out of your school-room."

"Why do you speak so to me?" cried Violet, in anger.

"Because you deserve it. The idea of Countess Leigh making an intimate of any stranger that she picks up in the museum."

"I do not make an intimate," said Violet, hotly.

Then she stopped and blushed, for she realized that in some way Miss Hope had led her on to talk in a free and friendly strain, both at the museum and that morning in the boudoir. She certainly had made the acquaintance very easily.

And she had never thought of the suggested recommendations. No doubt she had been childishly rash.

She might have repented had Lord Leigh been wise enough to leave her to her own reflections. But he went on:

"Adventurer is written on the woman's face. People of that stamp are full of lies and gossip, and go about to deceive, and make trouble, and fasten themselves like vampires on rich young women, such as you."

"What?" cried Violet. "Even a teacher of embroidery follows me for my fortune?"

"Certainly; it is the first thing one thinks of about you. You will be the prey of the public if you are so approachable. I wish you not to make acquaintances except those that I introduce to you."

"You mean to be a tyrant, then?"

"Has not that always been the rule with you? Did your aunt allow you to take up with strangers? Certainly not. And I am quite as much interested in your welfare. I do not like the woman's looks. I forbid you to have anything more to do with her."

"I must finish my lessons," said Violet.

"Of some other teacher; not of her. Remember that young, and inexperienced, and evidently careless, as you are, if you fall in with people in this way, you will come upon some evil genius of your life who will ruin you. Here

we are at the Montressors. I will go in after Lady Clare and her friend; let us drop this matter. And remember, Lady Leigh, see that woman no more."

He ran up the steps of the hotel where the Montressors were, and left Violet alone in the carriage.

She was deeply hurt and offended. Authority had never before borne on her in this way. He interfered with her; he was to choose her acquaintances down to the humblest. And chief of all, he chose Clare Montessor, who had never been congenial to her.

Why had not Clare gone on to Norway, as she talked so freely of doing? Was she staying in Paris all on Lord Leigh's account?

And still among all her musings rang the words:

"You will meet the evil genius of your life."

Would she?

Indeed, yes; the unconscious and fated Violet had met her in this very woman, this unassuming, softly spoken Miss Hope, and well did Lord Leigh know it.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I LOVE YOU AND I HATE YOU!"

Violet was too little practiced in what are called the "proprieties of social life" to show an entirely clear brow and genial welcome to Lady Clare Montessor and her friend, Lady Jane Hartley, when they came out to join her.

On this occasion there seemed to exist some secret understanding between Lady Clare and Lady Jane. There were broken sentences, guarded glances exchanged, and inquisitive looks at Violet.

Lord Leigh, on his part, ignored his recent anger, and tried to be more than usually agreeable. He glanced at the cold, haughty, quiet face of Lady Clare. She had a certain style, if no beauty—a style that he rather liked; and once he had thought, at his father's suggestion, of making her Lady Leigh. His father had said, "In this generation we happily need not look for money to build up the Leighs; let us reinforce with high birth."

But later this Leigh had speculated and betted, and he had needed the fortune more than the blue blood. There

was a face in the background of his life that outvalued the style and rank of Clare and the fortune of Violet, but a face that Norman Leigh had sentenced to exile from his heart.

After their dinner, in a private room at the hotel, the ladies withdrew to a reserved parlor. Finding little of interest in the chat of her two companions, Violet went out on a balcony, and wandering up and down, happened to come near a window where her cousin and Lady Jane were seated. Suddenly she heard Lady Jane say:

"What do you suppose was Lord Leigh's reason for whisking his wife out of Paris to-day? I never was more surprised than when he came in and begged us to get ready for Sevres at once, and let it seem as if we had arranged the matter some hours earlier."

"Leigh has a talent for maneuvering," said Lady Clare.

"But people seldom maneuver for sheer love of it. There must be a reason. Is there a lover in the case, think?"

"A lover! That baby-faced chit is not likely to have a lover."

"Men like baby-faces; and London raved over her."

"Money—only her money. And now that is in Leigh's hands. It is what he married her for, and he took care to get the handling of plenty of it. The rest is tied to her children."

"Money or not, she is sweet enough to win hearts," said Lady Jane, "and I feel sure he must have seen some one adoring her afar off, or heard that some one was enamored of her looks, or have seen her glances wandering, or why should he hurry her here, with us for company, and not wish her to know the scheme? I'll venture he feared to have her meet some one at the opera to-night."

Violet heard astounded. She seemed to be always hearing things she should not hear, and which set her against Lord Leigh. Her thoughts flew to Keith. Had Leigh in some way heard that she was Keith's early love, and had he carried her off lest Keith should see her? Was he developing the tyrant so quickly?

If she must be suspected and treated as a criminal, when her intentions were so pure and lofty—when she was sure she was putting Keith out of her heart for mere sake of goodness—she would not endure it, she would run away from Leigh, and hide herself forever.

At this moment she saw on the distant end of the balcony a glittering point, which she knew must represent Leigh's cigar, as he took his after-dinner smoke. She went boldly to him.

"Why did you bring me here to-day, Norman?"

"I thought you would enjoy it."

"Was it to take me away from any one? To prevent my seeing some one?"

Lord Leigh took his cigar from his lips, and there was a little silence, then he said:

"Really, Violet, that is a most absurd inquiry. I wish you were not so suspicious. It is very unbecoming in one so young, and in a wife."

"I only desire to say to you," said Violet, "that if you do not wish me to see any one, or have evil thoughts of any one, I would rather you would deal with me openly."

"Put such folly out of your head," said Lord Leigh. "I assure you I am afraid of nobody."

Still, the idea that he was jealous about Keith lingered, and unluckily kept her thoughts with Keith most of that night. At breakfast she was made ashamed of these suspicions, and, being ashamed, became more kind to her husband, to atone for the injury done him in her hasty thoughts. He said to Lady Clare:

"Have you seen Lord Keith?—he is in Paris."

"I hardly know him," said Lady Clare.

"He is a mighty fine fellow. He called on us the other day, only I was out. Why doesn't he come again, Violet? Did you frighten him off with your cold ways? I must look him up. It will be nice to have him come to our box at the theatre or opera, so I can stroll round to the others, to see Lady Clare and the rest of the people."

Evidently he had no jealousy or ill thoughts of Keith. Perhaps he had come to Sevres just to amuse her. Thus Violet blushed for herself, and tried to find more virtues in her indifferent husband. In fact, for the next few days after they returned to Paris he attended her much more closely than before. They went to the Park Monceaux one afternoon, and leaving the carriage at the gate, strolled about the walks looking after the flowers, children, and water-fowl.

Glancing about, as they rested on a rustic seat, Violet saw Miss Hope, her proposed embroidery mistress, seated

some rods off. She wondered if Leigh saw her, but evidently he did not. He said, presently:

"Come, Violet—it is time we were continuing our drive."

He took her to the carriage, but when she was seated in it he drew back.

"On second thought, I will let you go alone. I must call on a member of our club, who lives near here."

He stood watching until the landeau turned a corner, then he re-entered the park, and rapidly approached Miss Hope.

She sat drawing geometric figures on the sand of the walk with the tip of her parasol, and did not look up, even when he stood before her.

He said, in a low, angry tone:

"Why did you thrust your society on my wife?"

"I warned you I would. I do as I say."

"And why, I wish to know?"

"I told you your wife should be a miserable woman."

"It is not in your power to make her so."

"And why not?"

"We are not a romantic couple. She has invested no grand passion in me, and will not be disturbed by anything you may tell her. She is not to be made miserable by any revelations."

"Then I will, instead, make you miserable."

Lord Leigh laughed hardly.

"You cannot. I have married two millions, and, unless you rob me of that, I am safe."

"Rest assured I shall find some way!" she cried, fiercely.

"And why all this zeal in the cause of misery?"

"You know why," she said, rising, and looking him in the eyes. "You know I loved you. I adored you. I cast myself at your feet. You played with my passion. The first time I saw you I was infatuated with you. Why, I cannot tell. You saw it; and, for the sake of meeting and courting my pupil, Edna Ambrose, you amused yourself with my devotion. You threw away idle words, looks, flowers, books, on me; and I, fool that I was, dreamed I should be Lady of Leigh. I will be revenged on you. I love you, and I hate you! Since love has no satisfaction, hate shall!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"I KNOW HIM OF OLD."

The day after their return to Paris from Sevres, Lord Leigh had said to Violet:

"I hope you will remember to dismiss your embroidery teacher."

Violet knew that she would only put herself in the wrong by resisting, so she sent Kate with a note, inclosing five pounds, and saying:

"I find I cannot take the lessons. I forgot to ask your price. I hope this will pay for the trouble and the material."

The second day after, as she was entering her landau, a little boy handed her a note. She opened it, and read:

"LADY LEIGH: I am sorry you cannot continue the lessons. It seems hard that you should be deprived of such a small indulgence as that. I return two pounds ten, which you overpaid me. I am not a pauper, but a gentlewoman, if I am earning my bread, and I did not expect *you* would try to make me an object of charity. But I see the world of fashion is all alike. I shall be thinking of this experience while I am copying some lace patterns at the *Hotel de Cluny*, where I shall be busy for the next week.
HELEN HOPE."

Violet was much distressed by this note. It seemed to put her in the wrong. She felt as if she had insulted this lonely lady, and her vivid imagination pictured her brooding over her grief, as she worked in the Museum of Antiquities.

Why need she insult and pain a sister woman, young, lonely, and poor? Violet was very sensitive to an implied reproach, and the following day she could not resist going to the Hotel Cluny, to find Miss Hope, and beg her not to be hurt; that she had meant no unkindness; to try and explain away her sudden change about the lessons.

It never occurred to her frank mind that this was what Helen Hope had intended as a result of her note.

If Violet had really loved her husband, or felt that he loved her, she would have recognized the royal authority of love over her actions, and she would not have reasoned herself into a step contrary to Leigh's wishes.

When she went to the old palace of Cluny, looking from the Hall of the Baths, she saw in a corridor Helen Hope alone, apparently absorbed in copying embroidery.

She looked up, and bowed in an offended way, as the graceful figure of the Countess of Leigh drew near.

"I came to find you," said Violet, in her gentle, entreating voice. "I wish to tell you I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings. I would not for the world—I am sorry I cannot——"

She stopped, hesitating, for she was never good at explanations, and Miss Hope's cold, imperious gray eyes seemed looking her through and through, and scorching her very soul.

"I see. It was your husband who forbade you."

"He did not think it was well," began Violet.

"That you should see me?" interrupted Miss Hope. "He was afraid of what I might tell you. I know him of old."

"*You* know my husband?" cried Violet, startled inexpressibly.

"Yes, well. Better than you do, or you would not be Lady Leigh."

"I do not believe it," said Violet, turning red and pale.

"*You do believe it.* He knew me when he was engaged to Miss Ambrose—and before."

"That is an old story," said Violet, feigning indifference, though her heart was in a terrible tumult.

"It will never grow old to me," said Miss Hope. "I have watched you two together. You do not care for him, but I loved him. Oh, you start! You had never heard of me. Yes, Lady Leigh, he has touched my hand, and kissed my lips, and called me by my name, and given me gifts—this very bracelet that I wear; and now he pretends to you not to know me; he calls me an adventuress, and forbids my presence near you. What do you think of that for treachery?"

In her fury Helen Hope had used one of Lord Leigh's very expressions, and it struck coldly home to Violet's sensibilities. There was just enough of living truth in this garbled tale to give it an impressiveness that branded it on poor little Violet's heart. She had stood rooted to the spot, as if held with a fatal fascination by Helen Hope's voice and eye. Now she started.

"I am sorry for you; but in all this I am helpless."

"I know you are. I am the one who should be sorry for you, fettered to a man who deceives you. Your husband has no tender heart, Lady Leigh. Once he gave me flowers and wandered with me along Leigh woods, and now he would rather see me starve on the streets of Paris than earn bread at your hand."

Even as she spoke she searched the lovely flower-like face of the little Countess of Leigh. This morning talk was but the beginning of her plan for vengeance. She was studying her victim. Violet was her enemy solely because, in marrying Lord Leigh, she had unconsciously crossed Helen Hope's passion and ambition.

"Hush! hush! Do not speak so. Let me help you."

"Thanks. I need no help. I am glad I have seen you. I shall always remember you as a sweet creature, worthy a better fate. Lady Leigh, you are crying; drop your vail; people will be staring at you."

Violet dropped her vail, and, as one dazed by a heavy blow, she went out into the small, still, lovely garden of Cluny, an ancient garden known even in Roman times; but in all who had walked its rosy shades, perhaps no sadder heart had beat than that of the forlorn heiress of the Ainslies, whose life had come to such untimely wreck at its opening. The ripple of waters, and the smile of the flowers she loved, could not console her, who, seeking bread of life at a husband's hand, had been given but a stone. She had looked for love, and received only the burnt out ashes of a dead heart.

* * * * *

That evening there was to be a grand ball given by the Duc d'Etoile, and Lord Leigh and his bride were among the chief guests.

Violet stood in her dressing-room before the cheval glass, while the skilled hands of Kate arrayed her. But Violet's changeful brown eyes did not regard the exquisite figure that the glass mirrored in a robe of white brocade, the waist covered with a fine network of pearls, ropes of pearls about the smooth neck, and the dainty dimpled wrists, a string of pearls wreathed in the dark waves and braids of her shining hair. Her eyes were rather fastened on a bouquet waiting for her on her dressing-table. A white bouquet,

snowy heath, and heliotrope, and lilies of the valley, and tiny white rosebuds, all white, and fragrant, and fair as her own sweet self. It had come to her from Kenneth Keith. She trembled, and her heart beat fast, and her eyes filled with bitter-sweet tears as she looked at it.

She was dressed, and went into the drawing-room where Lord Leigh waited.

Kate followed her with a satin cloak lined with swans-down.

"You look as a Countess of Leigh should look," said Lord Leigh, surveying the enchanting figure with some pride. "But how white you are—not only your dress, but your face is as white as your bouquet."

"Lord Keith sent me my bouquet," said Violet, trembling.

She was resolved that however Leigh might deceive her, on her part she should be thoroughly open and clear.

"Did he? Good of him," said Leigh, carelessly. "Didn't know but you had offended him. Keith was always fond of flowers; had his room in Oriel College cumbered with a great stand of plants, and new bouquets every day."

He gave her his arm and they went down to the carriage, Violet wondering if she should see Keith at the ball.

Yes, he was there. He came to them soon after they entered the room; and while a buzz of compliment, a fire of admiring glances followed the charming bride of Leigh, there leaped from Kenneth's eyes one flash of adoring admiration that meant more than all the rest.

"Thank you for my bouquet," said Violet, as he came up.

"I am glad if you like it. May I ask a dance—two?"

"The first belongs to Lord Leigh," said Violet, timidly.

"But they don't all belong to me," said Leigh, in the most matter-of-fact manner. "A man doesn't expect to dance with his wife all the sets. Certainly, you have a dance for Keith, Violet. Put him down for two or three waltzes. He is a wonderful waltzer."

Violet took out her tablet, and blindly followed her fate. But the heart of Keith said that if this pearl of women was his wife, he would be the man who would wish to dance with his wife all the sets, and would feel a cruel agony if he saw her whirled away in other arms. Did he not feel some of that agony as she danced with Leigh?

The gorgeous palace of the Duc de'Etoile was a blaze of light.

In all that brilliant assembly, Violet, in her snowy beauty, with her guileless face and shy, gentle mien, shone as a bright particular star. Every one inquired about her, and admired her, and envied Lord Leigh. Never had her aunt, the Countess Montessor, been so surrounded by a crowd of eager men as now, when this charming bride was beside her.

It is not in youth and health to resist such surroundings. Violet loved dancing; her little feet naturally kept time to music; and now all the splendors that met her on every hand wiled her from herself, and she grew bright and gay; and, for the hour, all those dark figures that had begun to fill the background of her life and intrude upon her silent hours, faded out of sight. But it was when she danced with Kenneth Keith that joy strangely passed into pain, and Violet became pale and still.

CHAPTER XV.

“THERE ARE SOME WOMEN SO LOVELY THEY CAN NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.”

After the second waltz with Lord Keith, the ball-room seemed too close and dazzling for Violet. She longed for quiet—some silent place to still the confusion of her heart and brain.

Captain Gore and Sir Hugh Hunter, who had been at her wedding, were in Paris for a few days, and she had promised a dance to Captain Gore. She excused herself on the score of fatigue, and when the floor was once more a kaleidoscopic vision of beautiful figures floating about on strong arms, with long, flower-crowned tresses waving, or braids shimmering under the brilliant lights, Violet left her aunt's side, and passing out on a balcony, was wiled into the inclosed garden, where parti-colored lamps made a new bizarre day among the flower-set paths. She moved along to a fountain, and sat down by the brim, and above her a great magnolia spread its dark shining leaves and

nectar-laden flowers. On her lap lay Keith's bouquet. She had heard Leigh pressing on Keith a share in some of their plans for the next week or two, and she had seen Kenneth divided between desire and fear to accept.

A step on the gravel suggested to her the he whom she had loved and lost, and found but to lose more unutterably, was near. She remembered his step through all those parted years. She looked up.

"I saw you come out alone. Are you ill or tired, Violet?"

In her brief married life Leigh had never spoken to her with tones of such absorbing tenderness. Keith did not know the infinite love that was in his voice.

"No; but I grow tired of tumult. I think I am made for more quiet things. I believe I am more like Wordsworth's Lucy than any one else—a simple little person, happiest when out of sight. You remember—

"She grew beside the untrodden ways,
Along the banks of Dove,
A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love."

That is like me. You sent me this bouquet, did you not? I was glad to get it. I feared you might be angry."

"Angry? I could never be angry with you, Violet."

"I think you have great cause. When a woman spoils a man's life, then he has great cause for anger. But you said you would be friends with me, after all."

"Yes, and I am, heart and soul. To begin, I fear you will take cold out in the air, with your neck uncovered. You look so frail to me. Allow me."

And taking a large white silk kerchief from his pocket, he laid it gently about her shoulders.

Violet looked up at him with her innocent eyes.

"I like to be taken care of," she said, simply; and Keith felt such a thrill of rebellion against the fate that forbade his constant care of her, that he drew back a step in self-defiance.

"This is a brilliant scene, this ball, and I hope you are enjoying it," he said; "and if you like quiet pleasures and rural scenes, as I know you do, no doubt you will like it much at Leigh Towers. I understand it is one of the finest, most romantic estates in England."

Violet remembered how Leigh Towers was poisoned for her by the shadows of Miss Ambrose and Helen Hope.

"I do not expect to be happy," she said, quietly. "Lord Keith, how did you come to send me all white flowers? They match my dress exactly. I love white flowers."

She was trying thus poorly to get into safe conversation.

"Perhaps I considered that you are a bride, and then I remembered how, long ago, in Lincolnshire, you liked the white flowers, the white violets, the saxifrage, the white fox-glove; and then, too, these white flowers reminded me of that sweet, noble saying of yours, the other day, that though you could not be happy, you could and should find your satisfaction always in being good; and I hoped the perfume of these flowers would say to you that goodness is sure to grow into happiness."

Violet raised the flowers to her face.

"It is a doubly lovely bouquet," she said, "with all those sweet meanings in it. I wish it would last forever; but it will die. But your words shall never die. Now I know you are my friend."

"Oh, how it grieves me," said Kenneth, "to hear those sad tones in that voice, which used to ring as clear and glad as any flute. Violet, you must be happy; for my sake will not be happy?"

"I think I can only promise to endure bravely," said Violet, after a little meditation. "To you, to most people, Lord Keith, it may seem a very simple thing, this trouble of mine. To be married, and not love or be loved, that is an old and common story. Many think married love is all a romance; Lord Leigh does. But you know I have never had a real home, nor the association of those really belonging to me. My nature needs some one to cling to. I want to be taken care of, to be loved, and petted, and encouraged by some one who loves me for myself alone, not for anything that I have; some one who would love me just as well if I were a poor girl—a Lord Ronald, such as loved Lady Clare, you know."

"Yes? But I have forgotten Lord Ronald, I fear," said Keith, feeling that he was on dangerous ground.

"Forgotten Tennyson's ballad of Lady Clare? She was thought a great lady and heiress, and the day before she was to marry Lord Ronald, she found she had been changed at nurse, and was not a great person at all; and

she put on 'a russet gown,' and went and told Lord Ronald, and then:

"He laughed a laugh of merry scorn;
He turned and kissed her where she stood;
'If you are not the heiress born,
And I,' said he, 'the next in blood—
'If you are not the heiress born,
And I,' said he, 'the lawful heir,
We two will wed to-morrow morn,
And you shall still be Lady Clare.'

"Now, you see, she could not doubt that she was really loved. But few people are like that. My cousin, Clare Montessor, thinks the Lady Clare was simply idiotic to tell the truth; and I know if Lord Leigh had been in Lord Ronald's place he would have blamed Clare, and ended all."

Despite his sorrows and disturbance, Lord Keith had to smile at Violet's simplicity. She was so exactly such as she had been four years before.

"I am sure Leigh would have done better than that," he said.

"Lord Keith—Kenneth, you are a man, and you can tell me truly. If a man pretends to love a woman, and merely trifles with her feelings, and goes off and leaves her, is he always—is he not a cruel, bad man?"

Keith had heard various stories of Leigh, and he felt something of what was in her mind. He replied bravely:

"Not always. You do not know the world nor women, Violet. There are women who pursue men and seek to marry them, and, failing, make a loud outcry about deceit and wounded affections. Men are not always the ones to blame. Some women claim attention, some misconstrue the commonest attentions. And then, if these follies have been in a man's life, he settles down and abandons them when he is married."

"Unless he has loved one he cannot forget," said Violet. "I suppose there are some women so lovely they can never be forgotten."

This was too much for the resolution of Kenneth Keith. His heart-woe burst forth in an uncontrollable cry:

"Like you, Violet—little Violet, like you! Can I ever forget you?"

Violet realized what she had done in opening, in her unguarded confidence, such a flood-gate of passion, her heart,

breaking for Keith's sorrow, sprang up, and, laying her hand on his folded arms sobbed out:

"No, no! don't say it! don't feel it! I am not worthy of it. Forget me, Kenneth—it is all I ask. Let me suffer alone!"

Was that a tear, a man's hot, bitter tear, that fell on her bare, white arm?

Kenneth turned his back and stood silent, struggling with himself. Violet, like a culprit waiting sentence, stood beside the fountain. Keith turned.

"I do not wish to forget you; I do not wish you to suffer; and I am sure I shall learn to look at life as I ought. You can help me best, Violet, by accepting your lot with content; by resolving to be happy; by seeking all the good that is in your husband, and learning to love him."

"He does not want my love," moaned Violet. "I must learn to do without love. I have believed that love was the sweetest, holiest thing; that it was woman's life, her strength and stay; and I must do without it all; and I will! I, too, can be strong. Leave me. Good-by, Kenneth. We will never talk of this again."

Keith felt that he must go. He left her alone.

What would Lord Leigh have thought if he had seen Violet then, and learned the depths of tenderness and sorrow in her soul? Knowledge of her capacity for loving might have roused him to love, and changed all their lives. But he had said his wife was romantic and poetic, and these were surface feelings, while her true nature was passionless as lilies are.

Ignorant of the real depths of her heart, he went blindly on, and day by day he and Violet drifted on a darkening fate.

Oh, what might have been saved them if he had only known her better!

CHAPTER XVI.

A DANGER IN THE WAY.

Violet, Countess of Leigh, now stood in most perilous places. On the one hand, the indifference of a husband so little in sympathy with her; on the other, the revival of her

early love for Keith betrayed her. Environed by such dangers, how many young and lovely women have gone down to ruin ere they were aware!

Child as she was in heart and experience, Violet was entering on a long and terrible tragedy. Should she come out of it unscathed in soul, the garments of her womanly purity still white as snow, or was it written in her fate that Violet Leigh was born not only to sorrow but to reproach?

She did not see her husband until dinner the day after the duke's *fete*. She was dressed for the opera when she came in. Her dress was a blue Chinese crape, caught with knots of myosotis, and the clouds of puffed lace that lay over her neck and arms were held by bands of pearl and turquois. Her costume was very becoming.

Lord Leigh nodded approval.

"That is right. These fastidious Parisians can find no fault with that. There will be plenty of admirers about our box, I fancy. I told Keith we should see him there."

"Why did you do that? I do not think any one gentleman should be singled out for attention."

Lord Leigh burst into a laugh.

"I—used to know Lord Keith," said Violet, flushing painfully, and looking down as one confessing a crime. "I liked him—much. And he liked me."

"Showed his good taste," said Lord Leigh, eating truffle.

"My aunt—warned me," said Violet, ready to cry, "that if any one *young* man paid me attention, people might make remarks, and—you might be angry."

"Bless your soul!" said her husband, with coolest indifference, "I shall not be angry. You have a quantity of poetry and romance, but altogether of the Tennysonian sort. Who is going to be jealous of you? One might as well expect a woman of snow to take fire, as such a cool little creature as you to stir up a passion. Don't imagine yourself into a three-volume novel, Lady Leigh. You have my full warrant to be agreeable to all who call at our box. No one will hang about you more than I do about Lady Clare, and who minds that?"

"I don't see what you find attractive in Lady Clare," said Violet, firing up, for she was naturally jealous.

"No? I like her cold style; and her patrician face shows pure blood, if she is plain. I wish you could learn to sweep

a house with your glass, or look a person down, as Lady Clare does. But she has one charm—she has the most beautiful hands and arms in the world.”

“And she shows them off all the time,” cried Violet.

“Who wouldn’t when they are so superb? Now yours are too slender,” said the husband, with refreshing frankness.

Violet was ashamed of herself that she had shown any pettishness about her cousin. The nature of Lady Leigh was generous and noble. She desired to change the conversation, and so cease to discuss Lady Clare.

“When are we going to Switzerland? I am tired of Paris.”

“Let us start Friday, if you do not fear the day. Are you in haste to get away from Lady Clare? Surely you are not doing me the honor to be jealous of me?”

“No, I am not. Only love is jealous,” said Violet, angrily.

“Fie, child, don’t be angry. Why do we come on the verge of quarrels constantly? We need a third party to keep the peace between us. I mean to ask Keith to join us in Switzerland. He will be good company.”

That evening at the opera, between the acts, Kenneth Keith made his way to Violet’s box. Leigh welcomed him.

“Keith,” he said, after a few moments, “come with us to Switzerland. You’ll understand Lady Leigh’s raptures over scenery much better than I shall. I’ll depend on you for all the poetry about ‘gentian bells,’ and ‘rosy snows,’ and ‘gleaming glaciers.’ I promised to go to Lady Clare Montessor’s box. Shall I leave my wife in your care?”

Much as he loved Violet, Lord Kenneth Keith loved honor more. Violet’s timidity, and her husband’s confidence, called him to the serene and easy paths of simple friendship. He summoned all his tact, and when they left the opera-house, Violet’s heart felt at rest. What had she feared? What had she to fear? She had lost in Keith a lover, but she had gained a friend and brother. What could be more sweet?

“You’ll come along with us, Keith?—save us a guide?” said Leigh, as Keith stood by their carriage.

Keith looked at Violet, and the happy, hopeful look in the ingenuous brown eyes decided him for the path of danger. He answered:

"I will meet you there."

He was just turning from the carriage, when a figure came between him and the step, an arm was reached forth, and a woman's voice said:

"You dropped this."

Lord Leigh fairly snatched the handkerchief held out by the extended hand.

"Drive on! Why do you block the way?" he cried, angrily, to the coachman. "Violet, do lean back in your seat. To look about a crowd that way is surely bad form. From your remarks at dinner one would expect something better."

"I thought the person who gave you the handkerchief was the Englishwoman who was teaching me embroidery."

"Yes? Adventurers hang about everywhere."

"She said her name was Helen Hope."

"Took it out of a directory, no doubt."

"I was sure I saw her in the house to-night. She was watching you while you were at Lady Clare's box."

"There, you see, what trouble you get me into, by taking up with stray adventurers," said Leigh coolly. "No doubt she will be begging me for fifty pounds, for a country woman in distress."

"But did you never meet her before?"

"What nonsense!—to ask such a question!"

"But did you?" persisted Violet.

"No, I did not," said Leigh, tartly.

Violet was sure he was telling her an untruth, and she thought of it with angry scorn.

Then she blamed herself for pressing him to it. But would not she have answered any question frankly? She felt sure she would.

Meanwhile Leigh knew that the handkerchief given him contained a note, and he cursed his fate that he was pursued by Helen Hope.

Finally in his dressing-room he unfolded the scrap of paper tied in one corner of the kerchief.

"Meet me on the Pont de la Concorde, to-morrow evening at twelve o'clock, unless you prefer to see me at your rooms."

"HELEN H."

One clear and open course was before Lord Leigh. He could have allowed his enemy to pursue him to his own

home if she dared, and have defied her. With Violet he had nothing to lose. But, unfortunately, he had pretended to Violet that this woman was a total stranger. The crooked paths of deceit were more natural to Leigh than the highway of truth. All the terrors of his fate came upon him from the lack of moral courage to meet and brave in clear light the danger that lay in his way.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE BRIDGE AT MIDNIGHT.

The splendid mansion of the Duchess of Pontalba, next to the British Embassy, was a blaze of light and magnificence. Carriage after carriage rolled up, and left at the stately portal, fair and richly dressed women, and men titled, renowned, decorated with the orders of many kingdoms.

Among the throng which passed over the strip of velvet carpet, under the damask canopy, and so up the marble steps, guarded by tall urns, filled with gorgeous tropic plants, was Lord Leigh, with Violet, his wife. Lord Leigh, possessor of an old name, a vast estate, and the hand of the richest heiress in England, was the center of all eyes, and the envy of most hearts, as he led his bride to salute the Duchess of Pontalba.

But when the gorgeous assembly rooms were filled, and in the smiling, talking, dancing throng, one could not be missed. Norman Leigh wrapped a cloak about him, and passing from the glittering scene, went with rapid step through the Rue Royale, and the Place de la Concorde out upon the Pont de la Concorde to the meeting to which he had been summoned.

Leigh seated himself on the heavy parapet, and looked moodily at the river running blackly under the fine frowning arches.

Part of these huge granite blocks had been in the hopeless, fateful walls of the bastille; but never had beaten near them a heart harder than that of Norman Leigh, nor stormier than that of the woman who had summoned him to this tryst.

Sitting there in his cloak, his arms folded on his bosom, his eyes on the dark river, with its ripples lit with reflected fire, Leigh heard the steps and trailing of a woman's gown, but he never moved nor spoke. She went by him and returned, but still his eyes were on the Seine. Then she stopped and held out her hands with a cry as if wrenched from her by some mighty throes of agony.

"Norman, speak to me!"

He turned his face slowly to her.

"What is the meaning of all this nonsense—this meeting?"

"It means that I must and will see you."

"This all might as well be ended first as last. I had supposed that my marrying would finish your folly."

"When one cannot live for love one lives for vengeance."

"That sounds tragic, but it does not suit the nineteenth century; it belongs to the middle ages and the theater. I met you to-night simply to make you hear sense. You have been resolved to marry me. You fancied that you could be Countess of Leigh. You see that is forever ended."

"If I had only known sooner. If I had not been held fast in my bed by fever, you should not have married."

"I do not think you could have prevented it. But that is all done. If it is money you demand, Helen, I am willing to be liberal, on condition that you keep entirely away from me and my wife."

"I will not have a penny of your money till I have all you have," cried Helen Hope, furiously.

"That is arrant folly," said Lord Leigh, calmly.

"You may be free again," panted she; "men get free by divorce or by death. You only married for money."

"That may be. How much I needed money may be known when it outweighed the rank and blood of Clare Montessor, and the beauty of Edna Ambrose."

"And for me---did you never think of me?" she wailed.

"Oh, Norman. Norman, no one ever loved you as I have."

He looked in silence at the river.

"Tell me---if you were free, would you marry me?"

"No, I would not."

"Mark my words," she said, with concentrated fury, "you *shall* marry me or die! You shall be mine in life or in death. I will sit by your side as Countess of Leigh, or

we two will go down to death together, and if I cannot have love, I will have vengeance."

He shuddered at her tone; it had a weight as of prophecy in it. She towered in her fury as a sibyl.

"Helen Hope, what have I done more than other men that I should be pursued in this fashion?"

"You thought you exercised your patrician right when you trifled with me, a poor, lonely girl. I believed all that you said. I grew to adore you because I thought you stooped from high estate to lift me to your rank. And what were you doing all the time? Merely courting me, that through me you might gain access to my pupil; merely making me a means of reaching Edna. When my whole soul was at your feet; when I loved the sound of your voice, envied the air that blew about you, the very servants who waited on you—when you were my one thought in life, I found you at her feet protesting your passion for her, and when she told you she supposed you cared for me, you laughed the idea to scorn, and said you never had had such a thought ---that she was mistaken---that you had merely been a little kind to a forlorn soul. I am a forlorn soul; you have made me doubly so. Norman Leigh, I stand between love and hate. I swear to you you shall once more be free to choose a wife, and *you shall choose me or die!*"

"You are mad," said Leigh, with a thrill of fear.

"Hear me," she said. "I am resolved to be Countess of Leigh. You shall be free, and you shall be glad to marry me. The fortune you needed to restore your estates is yours. I will be no wife to be ashamed of; I know how to hold my own; there is good blood in my veins. I will not be hindered of the one hope of my life. Mark my words ---*you shall marry me, or die with me!*"

"This talk is all idle," said Leigh. "Go your way, and I will go mine. Mark me, I will not meet you again. Anything in reason to satisfy you I will do, but I will not come to hear threats and protestations."

He returned hastily to the splendors of the ball-room, and left Helen Hope gazing into the black depths of the river.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"NOW I SEE AND AM SURE OF MY REVENGE."

Morning in Berne, the first Swiss town where Lord Leigh and Violet have tarried.

Lord Leigh is pacing up and down the breakfast-room, and on a side table lie the letters which he has just opened.

A door swings open, and through it comes Violet. The flush of wild roses is on her cheeks, and light lies tremulous in her dewy brown eyes. The deft Kate has arrayed her in a tuft mull dress, with round, full waist, and blue sash tied in a great bow behind, like a child's. Fresh, simple, healthful, sweet, she enters, and faces the restless Leigh.

"Have you seen the mountains, Norman? I have been on the balcony watching them. The far-off ranges are all pink, and gold, and purple. The glaciers are like silver lakes."

"I'm dead sick of mountains. I'm sick of everything."

"You have been sitting up too late. You make yourself nervous, smoking so constantly, and drinking brandy and water," said Violet, versed by this time in the manners of her lord, and contrasting them with the early hours, the one glass of wine after dinner, and the single evening cigar, indulged in by the banker prince, her uncle.

Lord Leigh shrugged his shoulders, gathered the letters into his pocket, and drank a cup of tea as strong as lye. Violet noticed his excited eyes, his feverish manner.

"You will feel better for being out in the air," she said. "Let us walk or ride about here all day; let us keep quiet hours, and have plain, regular meals, and be like the country people. I like that life best. We cannot tire of going about here. It is just like Martin's picture of the Plains of Heaven."

"Twenty-four hours of this would kill me. I must make a start," said Lord Leigh, swallowing tea with brandy in it.

Violet viewed the decoction with disgust, and cried out: "Oh, Norman, must we go before I have seen anything."

"You needn't go. I'll be back in a week. I must give myself a little dip in life without you. I don't think I was made for a family man."

"What! leave me here all alone?" cried Violet, in dismay.

"You have four or five servants, and there are English people about. You can't expect me always to be tied to you, Violet."

She recalled that they had been married less than a month.

"And Keith is coming. He'll go about with you."

Violet's lips quivered as she considered that Keith's coming would be as much pain as joy, and more peril than comfort.

"Where are you going?" she asked, tremulously.

"To Homburg."

Violet had no idea what might lie wrapped up in the word Homburg. She mentally reviewed her geography, and told herself that Homburg was not so very far off. After all, what difference did it make? She really had no loving shelter in him, and she must learn to protect herself—to be strong in herself—as she had no one to lean on.

Thus it happened that within a month from her ill-omened wedding-day Violet was left alone in the little town of Berne.

She spent two days reading novels on the balcony, or walking about the small Swiss city, in guardianship of Kate, her maid, amusing herself in the unexciting method of feeding Berne's tutelar bears, and giving coin to sturdy Swiss children.

The third day, Violet, with a book, and Kate, with a roll of fancy work, set off to spend the morning in a little wooded plateau, where, through the openings in the trees, the Bernese overland lay revealed in all its serene splendors. In the lush grass of this plateau lay couchant, like a young lion, a youthful Saxon, large of limb, and frank of heart, lying with his yellow-curved head on his bent arm, his eyes on the distance, his thoughts with the woman he had loved and lost. Across the line of this dreamer's vision moved, cutting off, with her small, piquant figure,, a view of the

Finsteraarhorn; a slender creature, with brown hair ruffling about her sweet, shining eyes; a dainty vision, which this young man thought should go like the gods, marching on rosy clouds, with little loves and holy graces, rejoiced to be bearers of her train.

But, in her short nuns' vailing walking-dress, and unsupported by any being more ethereal or reliable than her maid Kate, Kenneth Keith's goddess moves on, and he perforce rises up to do her homage, which act he performs coldly enough, having his manners, if not his heart, well in hand.

Kate throws upon the gaass her lady's shawl, and retires to a convenient distance to embroider a hand-bag, to be added to the endless number now in her mistress' possession.

"I called at the hotel," said Kenneth, "and they said Lord Leigh had gone away. I did not expect to see you here."

"He did not take me. He said he would come back in a few days; and it is too stupid to stay in my rooms at the hotel all the time, even with the mountains to look at. Do you think it is wrong for me to go out with only Kate? I have no one here to ask. Will you tell me what is proper?"

"Oh, certainly it is proper; only it would be better if you had your aunt or some lady friend with you."

Violet's little head, with its plentitude of dusky locks, sank low. She was easily snubbed in regard to the proprieties of life, which Mrs. Ainslie has made a bugbear to her.

"I used to think a governess a hateful nuisance," she said, ingenuously; "but I wish I had one now. It is really comfortable to have some one who knows always what is to be done. I think it is nicer to go right than to have one's way."

"Your way is sure to be right," said Kenneth; and he added, with rising wrath: "A young bride should not be reduced to need either governess or companion. Her husband should be her companion and guide."

Violet lifted up two sudden, tearful eyes, like great dark jewels seen flashing through running water.

"I shall never have that," she said, piteously. "Do you think I had better get a companion—some 'lady in reduced circumstances,' as the advertisements read."

"You will need none when you get to Leigh Towers. You will be at home then, and have friends about you. How soon are you going?"

"I do not know. Not till Norman comes back. Tell me what to see here. Where can I go with Kate?"

"Leigh asked me to look after you, and I will," said Keith, with sudden resolution, "that is, if you will allow me. When Leigh comes, he can make excursions with you. What book have you? Let me read to you."

He thinks reading will be far more safe than looking into the humid eyes, and watching the pathetic mouth, and then, how easy for them to stray into dangerous topics!

She held out the little volume—square, in white and gold. Alas! it was "Locksley Hall!"

Kenneth Keith had not read it for years—not since the first days when he thought Violet had forsaken him. He had forgotten how cruelly the poem would paint their fate. Could his tone fail to ring home as he read:

"Oh, my cousin, shallow-hearted! Oh, my Amy, mine no more!"

He did not see how Violet's bosom was, as Amy's, "shaken with a sudden storm of sighs."

But when he read:

"Is it well to wish thee happy, having known me to decline
On a range of lower feeling, and a narrower heart than mine?"

he shut the book—he could go no further.

He sprang up.

"Let us not read. I will make you a daisy-chain, as if we were children, and I will sing you a song that boatmen sing along the Nile. The harsh Egyptian will be better than this Tennysonian melody."

Meanwhile, a woman who was sketching, seated some distance from them, beneath a beech tree, kept looking at them from under her wide hat, and a blaze of triumph dawned on the proud, handsome face of Helen Hope, as she said to herself:

"Now I see and am sure of my revenge!"

CHAPTER XIX.

“HE LOVES ME NOT.”

The next few days were to Violet a glimpse of fairy-land. Around her rose the grandeur and glory of the Swiss Mountains. The air that breathed on her was fresh from the glaciers and snowy summits, and the earth was carpeted with the flowers of the Alpine lands.

Wandering in these scenes, under the guardianship of Lord Keith, Violet found the fascination of glimpses of life in all ways foreign to her own.

Keith with wider knowledge of the world, and the people in it, while he resolved to cheer the forsaken bride, was too discreet to endanger her by his attentions. He found an English family in Berne, which he knew slightly, and secured the company of a pair of laughing, lovely twin sisters, who joined in the rambles and visits made with Violet. Thus Violet's fears were laid asleep; each day passed in frank, cheerful intercourse, and she fancied she had reached that ideal friendship which was to strengthen her for the loss of married love. Keith was wise enough not to occupy all Violet's time; he would not make the woman he loved, and desired to serve, conspicuous. Part of every day she rambled around as before, accompanied by Kate, and followed at a little distance, by a small creature, conspicuous for buttons, and known as a page.

One morning, she was wandering in this way, on the charming bank of the Aar, when she came suddenly upon a lady sketching. The artist lifted her face.

“Are you also forbidden to speak to me?”

“Certainly not. How are you, Miss Hope?” said Violet.

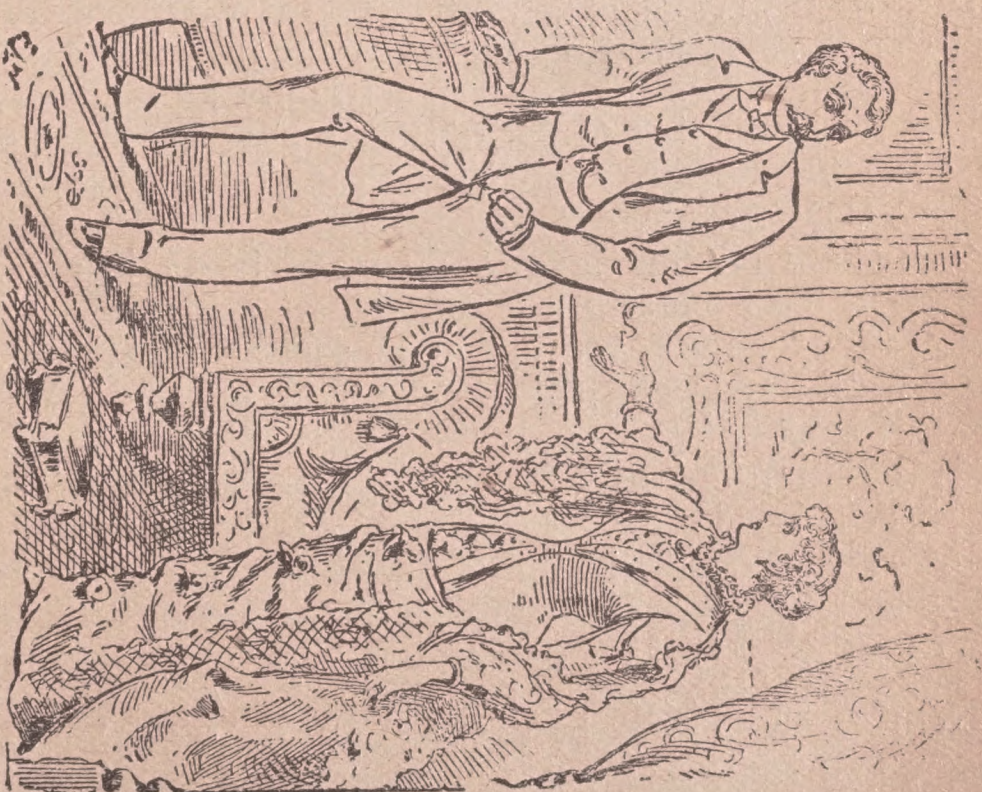
“Lonely, and I see you are alone, too. I have noticed you by yourself these several days. It is what I expected; and I feel for you, as we are both strangers in a strange land.”

There was an intense sorrow in Helen Hope's handsome face. She threw into the gray eyes a moving pathos. Violet seated herself on a convenient boulder.

"I KNOW THAT I HAVE MADE A GREAT AND HORRIBLE MISTAKE—BEEN CRUELLY DECEIVED."



"THEN IT WAS TO YOU I WAS INDEBTED FOR HIS CALL," SAID VIOLET, FIRE IN HER HEART.



"Kate, I am going to wait here a little, and look at this lady's sketches, if she will show them."

Kate and the little page seated themselves a little way off, and the page sentimentally picked the white rays off a daisy, to the old tune, "He loves me, he loves me not."

"I am sorry you are lonely," said Violet. "I am not; there is so much here to be seen and done. May I see your sketches?"

Helen Hope opened the portfolio of small sketches, and Violet turned them over with exclamations of wonder and delight.

"I do not pity you at all," said the young countess. "I think it must be heavenly to be able to do such charming things, and to feel that you are independent, and can go and come and make your own way."

"We all prefer some lot we do not have," said Helen. "I, whose heritage has been poverty, homelessness, loneliness, namelessness, have craved with a fiery thirst, a passion of desire, a name, rank, station, fortune. Can you wonder that once, when I thought they were all just in reach of my hand, that I was mad with hope and joy—that the fulfillment of my one dream intoxicated me, and that sudden despair, the ruin of my hope, has made me wild, heart-broken? When your husband praised my voice, my air, my face, my accomplishments, when he spent hours at my side, when his were the words and looks that I have heard lovers use, was it a wonder that I nourished the thought that I should be the Countess of Leigh?"

"But are all marriages to be made like this, and is this love that has such selfish foundations?" said Violet. "You loved him for rank, for name; he sought me for fortune; I accepted him, to end persecution and pursuit. Where in all this is love?"

"I loved *him*," said Helen. "To me, from his air, his title, he seemed a god; and when I thought he stooped to me, my whole soul was full of gratitude; and yet it was only because I was poor and nameless that I thought he stooped, for in myself I think I am as fit to be a countess as any one. I could carry the rank as well as you."

"Much better," said Violet, gently. "I am not handsome, and you are, very; and I am not accomplished."

"You do not need accomplishments—they are beggarly means of getting bread; and if you are not what is called

handsome, you have one of those fascinating faces that has been at the bottom of most of the mischief that has been since the world was made."

"Oh, please, you will make me vain!"

"You might as well know your power and possibilities, and get some good out of your life."

"I expect to get no good out of my life but goodness, and for that one does not need to be vain," said Violet, softly.

"And am I really telling you more than your glass ever did?" said Helen, with a sardonic smile on her turned-away face, as she looked at the red-shirted fisher-boy. "I can tell you more that I read in you. The key to your whole life is your desire to be loved. You want every one to love you, and for yourself alone. You resent being loved for your fortune. It grieves you even that a dog, or a stray child, or a beggar, or a waif such as I am, should fail to love you. You desire to be loved by Lord Leigh, whose capacity in that line is of the smallest, and you would grieve to lose the love of that handsome young man who acts as your squire, now your lord is gone."

"What! Oh, how can you be so wicked?" cried Violet, rising.

"Do not be angry," said Helen, seizing her dress to draw her back. "I only meant friendly or brotherly love, of course. So you would mourn if you lost the love of your poodle or the cat. Why so quick to take offense? Is it not true that you desire every face to light that looks at you—that all should joy at your coming and grieve at your going?"

Violet looked down, blushing and resentful.

"You think that a great weakness," she said, slowly.

"No; it is lovely. If I had had more of that quality, I might have been more beloved. Do not be angry at me. I want you to think well of me. Do not misjudge me. Let me tell you of myself. You think it was all mercenary ambition that drew me to Lord Leigh. You never imagined that back of my avarice and ambition lay the thought of a good, warm, self-devoting mother, to be cared for in her old age—of a little sister, lovely as a fairy, to be educated and made happy, and saved from the drudgery of a life like mine. I wanted to be the Lady Bountiful to all my poor relations and friends. I, who knew so well the

sting of penury, wanted to have opportunity to do good. Oh, how lavish I could have been in answering the cry of need! Do you know how many young girls are dying by inches of overwork—to how many a helping hand would be salvation for body and soul?”

Violet's anger vanished. She thought she had misjudged Helen Hope. Helen put into her false words an earnestness that Violet took for truth and feeling.

“Let me do these things,” she said. “Let me help you to do good. May I not help your mother and sister, too?”

“No, no,” said Helen. “I will work for them; but you can help others. But have you forgotten that your husband has bidden you to cast me out?”

Violet started. What should she do?

“I know he said so. Should I obey him blindly, when he——”

“Loves me not,” came the sharp, clear voice of the page, still counting his daisy rays.

“And I am so sorry,” said Helen, ignoring pause and page, “for I know what is in him. Though I love him, I know the error—yes, the crime, that he cherishes. I could help you if we might but be friends—help you meet your bitter fate.”

“I have a friend to help me,” said Violet, “if I have need; and also God will help me. But I will not cast you out. I will be friends with you,” and she gave Helen Hope her hand.

CHAPTER XX.

“SAVE ME, I BEG OF YOU!”

Six days had Norman Leigh been gone from Berne, and Violet was sitting alone on the balcony before her rooms in the Victoria Hotel, commanding the best view of the Alps.

A hasty step crossed her drawing-room and fell on the balcony; an exclamation, “Oh, my lady!” and Adam, Lord Leigh's valet, stood before her—Adam, who had gone to Homburg with Lord Leigh.

So they had returned; her peaceful life was broken.

“What, Adam, are you back? Lord Leigh sent no word.”

"My lady, I came alone."

"Where is my husband?"

"Dear lady, he is in Homburg," faltered the old man, for Adam was a gray-haired valet, formerly in the service of Norman Leigh's father.

"Why have you left him?" she cried.

"Oh, my lady," said Adam, in a low, vehement voice, drawing near to her in the moonlight, "he is in fearful danger, and I have come for you to save him."

"Danger! What danger? What do you mean? Is he ill?"

"Must your heart be broken?" said Adam, reluctantly.

"I think nothing that you can say will break my heart," faltered Violet.

Adam was close at her side; his head, that needed no powder to whiten it, was bent on his breast, and his stalwart, north-country figure shook as he spoke.

"Lady Leigh, I love your husband, not only as a servant loves his lord, but as a father loves his son. Boy and man, I have been true to him, and I promised his father on his dying bed that I would follow him everywhere, and save him if I could from his besetting sin. Oh, my lady, how I have tried to keep that promise! Do you know what that sin is, my mistress?"

"No," groaned Violet. "Say all you must, Adam."

"He is a master-hand at keeping things," sighed Adam.

"Lady Leigh, he—gambles."

"What!" cried Violet, "have I married a gambler?"

A moan from the old man was her only answer.

"And you mean that he is at Homburg—gambling now?"

"Mistress, I do."

"Let him go his own way," cried Violet, madly.

"Lady, dear mistress, hear me," pleaded old Adam. "I must speak terrible things. What with gaming debts and speculation he was near to ruin; but he married you. With the money of yours put in his hands, debts and mortgages were cleared, and money is assured for restoring the Towers and improvements, and a round sum in hand at the bankers for him, and the thought, perhaps, of the great income that he has with you yearly, has set him wild again, my lady. He has forgotten his fright—oh, my lady, how can I tell you?—he has lost seventy thousand pounds these

last five days, and if something is not done, he will lose all he can lose, and be loaded with debt; he will be finally ruined."

Violet gave a low, agonized cry.

"He is having no luck; he never has," said Adam.

"Luck!" cried Violet, indignantly. "Who wishes for him the gambler's luck or gains? That *luck* is degradation."

"Yes, my lady; but remember, it is that accursed luck on the one hand, or deadly ruin on the other; there is no safe, good way in that life; and if he meets ruin now, how shall he be helped?"

"It is true," said Violet, icily, as to herself, "he cannot marry another heiress. Let him go his way."

"Oh, my lady," persisted Adam, "you do not know what that way may be. He can go on to hopeless ruin, and then he can find at the end suicide, and the last Lord of Leigh can die in dishonor, and the old line will be ended."

"To die in dishonor, or to live in dishonor!" exclaimed Violet.

Adam threw himself on his knees and clutched the white, billowy garments stirred by the evening wind. Dry, hard sobs shook his frame; he moaned:

"Save him, my dearest lady, save my master!"

"Oh, Adam," said Violet, bursting into plentiful tears, what can I do? How gladly would I save him, but I cannot."

"You must, my mistress, you must—he is your husband!"

"Tell me what to do, Adam," said Violet, bending her child-like, tear-bathed face to the old servitor. "I know my fate and honor are linked to his. I bear his name; I would do anything to save him; but I am so helpless. What shall I do?"

"Come with me to Homburg, my lady. It is for that I have returned," cried Adam. "Come with me; go with me even into that accursed gate of Hades, as if an angel stepped into the mouth of the pit to bring back a soul it loved. Get him but once outside those fatal doors, pray him by his old name, his line, his father's memory, your love, by the little innocent babes that may be his some day, to leave that cruel town and go home with you to Leigh. Oh, lady, come with me. When he sees your lovely face he will obey."

Looking at the childish roundness of that soft face, at the dewy sweetness of those heavenly brown eyes, the kneeling servant could not imagine other than that her empire over his master should be absolute.

"Adam," she moaned, "I could do nothing; he would not come with me; he would only drive me away, and hate me for interfering. Oh, it would not do."

That changing, flushing, paling face seemed to Adam an irresistible argument; he insisted on his point.

"Lady, come with me, by this night's train, You will find him in the morning worn, exhausted, tremulous, despairing. You will come like an angel of hope and comfort; you will lead him back to safety. What man would refuse a sweet young bride like you?"

A wail broke from her against her will.

"He does not love me, Adam; he would not heed me; he would drive me away, and only hate me more for having discovered this. Oh, why did you come to me?"

"For the last hope of saving my master," said Adam, sturdily. "So that the name of Leigh shall not be scorned and scoffed, and that your fortune shall not be devastated, and your children shall not be beggars. My lady, don't resent, but pity him. He inherits this passion; it was born in him from his mother, my lady, and from her father. She was the daughter of an old army officer, who had ruined himself with gaming, and she lived on gaming until she married my lord's father. She had the beauty of Satan, as the French call it, and she led us a miserable life for five years, till she died, and left this passion in her son's blood. Oh, my lady, as by one woman the house of Leigh has fallen, and *he* has been destroyed, by you, dear lady, let it rise, and by you let him be saved."

Violet was sobbing wildly. She had thought the depth of woe reached on her wedding-day. She had found a deeper depth when she stood face to face with Kenneth Keith, and knew that he loved her and was lost to her. But now her woman's soul endured a fiercer agony, finding her fate bound to this gamester's, in whose veins ran the fierce and tainted blood of an adventuress mother.

"Lady, will you come with me to save him? It is but an hour before the train leaves. Oh, mistress, come!"

Then Violet's shaken soul rose up to do her duty.

"Adam," she said, "I cannot go, for it would be useless,

but my husband shall be saved. Bring me that cloak that lies within the window, on the divan. Come with me now, through the garden and to the Bernerhof Hotel. There is one there who will save your master."

The bells of Berne were ringing midnight, when Lord Keith himself answered a knock at the door of his private parlor. He opened it, and there, pale, trembling, stood Violet, the bride of Leigh.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I HAVE ONLY YOU TO HELP ME."

"Violet!" cried Lord Keith, so amazed at this unexpected, lovely, but sad apparition that he did not for the instant see the tall figure looming behind her in the subdued lamplight of the hotel corridor. "Violet!"

The little countess stepped back, and gave her attendant a pull at the sleeve.

"Tell him, Adam—tell him all. Only Lord Keith can help me. Only he can save my husband."

Old Adam stepped into the strong light, near the table where Lord Keith had been reading, and bent a searching look at the frank, manly face.

Keith seated Violet in a great chair, and stood with his hand on the back of it, while Adam told his story.

As the old man spoke, Violet's head bent lower and lower, and to the covert of her velvet hood she added the shelter of her white, jeweled hands, to hide her blushing face. Adam ended in a silence that might be felt.

Then suddenly Violet became heroic. She rose.

"Kenneth, I have only you in all the world to help me. You said you would be my brother. Go, save Norman, for he is my husband, and I cannot let him go to ruin. I dare not go to that wicked city. Go for me!"

She held out both her hands in pleading, and he took them, and kissed them with tenderness. He answered the entreaty in those wistful eyes.

"Yes, I will go. But I fear I can do little to help, Violet."

"My lord," said Adam, "I feel sure you can bring him

back. There is strength in your face; and, my lord, there is no time to lose."

Kenneth turned, and picked up his hat and cloak.

"I will go at once. We will see your mistress home on our way.

He drew her hand through his arm, and, with Adam in attendance, they passed through the deserted streets, and were soon at the foot of the balcony stair leading to Violet's apartment. Kate was there, looking down into the garden for her mistress.

Violet gave her hand to Keith, and all unconscious of her bewildering moonlight beauty, and of the tender pathos of that sweet, tremulous voice, that might unman any hero, said:

"God bless you, Kenneth. I have only you in all the world to help me. You will bring him back."

And then Kenneth Keith went forth from that fragrant garden, with its nightingales and roses, to crucify his own love and longing, and bring back the recreant, unworthy husband.

If the secret of eternal love and perennial beauty is incapacity for feeling any emotion, it is a secret all unpossessed by the young Countess of Leigh. All her power of self-mastery is exhausted when she dismisses Kenneth with some semblance of calmness. After that she flies up the balcony steps and flings herself face downward on the first plush sofa that offers itself, and sobs like a heart-broken child.

Kate stood by, astonished and alarmed at this outburst.

Suddenly Violet sat up and pushed back her wet hair, and turned a face like a rain drenched rose toward her humble companion.

"Kate, Kate! I have no friend here but you. Tell me, is it very wicked for people, most miserable, wretched people, to kill themselves?"

Kate flung herself at Violet's knees, and clasped the little hot hands.

"Oh, my own dear little lady, do not say, do not think such terrible things! Wicked, my own dear lady? It is most wicked—it is to destroy your soul."

"But, Kate, it seems as if I could not live any longer, and yet I cannot die. My breath won't stop. I am so miserable, and yet I am so young and strong. Oh, why am

"I so much more unhappy than other people? I am ruined, I am ruined!"

"What are you saying? You are wild, my little love," sobbed poor Kate, clasping her lady's knees. "What has happened? Where have you been?"

"Kate, I am ruined for this life, and I want to die. You will have to know, so I tell you—Adam came for me. Lord Leigh is at Homburg, gambling away all he has. I am married to a gambler! I have been to Lord Keith to go and bring him home, and save him for this time. But there will be other times and no one to go for him, and where will it end?"

"I don't care where it ends for him!" said Kate, savagely, her heart rising in an intense relief. "I wish it would end in his blowing his brains out, and leaving you free," she added to her herself. Then aloud: "Don't take on so, my lady. Don't talk of dying, lady dear, cheer up!"

And then the faithful Kate lifted Violet in her strong arms, and undressed her, brushed her brown rings of silken hair, and put her to bed, and until gray dawn sat near her, her heart answering to every plaintive sob and sigh that shook the prone figure of the little countess in her troubled sleep.

Two days after there was the sound of arrival, and Violet ran out of her dressing-room to give the best welcome she might to her returned husband. His worn, haggard face and restless eyes touched her. She went up to him, and putting up a soft hand to lay on each of his cheeks, she said, gently:

"I am glad you have come back, Norman!"

"So you've found out? More fool I!" he said, sulkily.

"Let us forget it," she said. "Let us think it a bad dream, and wake up to better things."

"Well, it's dused good-natured of you to say so. Jove! I'd like to show you what I think of it!"

"So you can," she said, leading him to a seat. "Let us go to Leigh Towers—let us go *home*, Norman!"

In what way Lord Keith had brought back to his duty the recreant Lord of Leigh, Violet did not know. Neither Keith nor Leigh said a word of that fatal visit to Homburg. But, uncongenial as the two men were by nature, an intimacy suddenly rose between them; Keith made the advances, and Leigh responded to them, surlily at first, as if

thinking himself watched, and then more easily, feeling that the friendship of a man of unsullied honor and noble standing, such as Keith, would aid him in maintaining his social credit, and hiding his errors from the world.

A million and a half of Violet's money had been so settled on herself and her children, that Leigh could only handle the income; and large as that was, and easy as the half million committed to himself had made him, Leigh knew that no fortune can defy the inroads made by a passion for gambling.

Reason now warned him to retreat to the safe shelter of his country life with his bride, before he finally wrecked himself.

CHAPTER XXII.

KEITH'S TASK IS SET.

"Go home, Leigh," said Keith, echoing, unconsciously, the plea of Violet; "go home and interest yourself safely. Go amuse yourself by being the country magnate."

"It would wear out in a season," said Leigh. "I can't live without excitement. I should go mad."

"You may find some excitement at Leigh Towers," said Keith, unaware that he was now unhappily among the prophets.

"Yes, I'll go home, but I know I'll break out again some way."

"In that case," saith Keith, calmly, "if you must have excitement, don't find it at the green table. Warn me, and I'll take you off to shoot lions in Africa, or hunt elephants in India, or run away from tigers in Burmah—anything that will not disgrace your wife;" and a vision came to him of Leigh and himself lying dead on burning sands or in deep jungles, torn by fierce beasts or devoured by fever, and of two women who wept at home—his mother and Violet, the little Countess of Leigh.

For Keith had taken up a work and meant to perform it to the end. He meant to save Violet and shield her from destruction, by guarding and rescuing her husband.

She was going from his sight. He might never see her again—at least, long months might roll by, and what might

she not suffer in them? The word had been given out for their return. Keith would go with them as far as Dover, then pass on his way to his mother, while they went on to that blighted home destined to make England ring with its tragedies.

"So you are going home," said Helen Hope, meeting Violet as she took a last ramble along the Aar. "Think kindly of me there, will you? We shall meet again. When you can no longer help yourself, come to me; I will help you."

And Violet went her way, sure that she should never need Helen Hope. Had she not Kenneth Keith to help her?

On the steamer to Dover, a tall, military man came up to Leigh and Violet, holding out his hand.

"Surely I am to be introduced?" he said.

"Lady Leigh, allow me to present Colonel Hartington, my cousin."

"Three or four removes—so far, heir presumptive of Leigh, with a hope the usurers will not lend a hundred on; though, Leigh, if you'd give me your photograph to carry round, I might have more chance."

With this double fling, the colonel walked off.

"Who is that detestable man?" asked Violet, turning her crimsoned face to her husband.

"My dearest enemy and nearest male relation, heir to Leigh, if I had no son—hates me, and I hate him."

"So would any one. What a cruel, sardonic face."

Dover, and the hour for parting with Keith. He stood in the private parlor engaged by Lord Leigh, and held out his hand to Violet. They were alone.

"Look at me kindly as you go," she said, calm from very excess of feeling. "Thank you, oh, thank you, for how good you have been to me, and do not hate me, for I am very unhappy."

"Happiness will come," he said, kissed her hand, was gone.

But, oh, how very far off lay happiness from Violet, to be sought through what burning desert of pain!

The journey ended, and Leigh Towers reached at last.

There are arches of flowers, and a roar of welcomes, and servants in new gowns and new liveries, drawn up in file, and all the castle is splendid in gala dress to welcome the most unhappy of all the brides of Leigh.

On that day, glorious at Leigh Towers for the bringing home of Norman Leigh's bride, there was a tenantry dinner at three o'clock. After lunch, Violet accompanied Lord Leigh to the great dining hall to see the tenants.

Leaning on her husband's arm, clad in the soft gray of falling evening, where her youthful bloom and the flush of her roses lent the pink tints of the flying sunset, and her lovely eyes seemed as if the first stars that look out in the night, Violet had not circled the board of feasting before the hearts of all, men and women, were at her feet. For the rest of that day, and for many other days, the chief talk on the Leigh estates was of the bride.

Somewhat cheerful she went to Kate to be dressed for dinner.

Sensitive as an Æolian harp to every breath about her, Violet responded to joy when joy surrounded her, and standing among the guests who thronged the splendid halls which owned her mistress, smiles wreathed her lovely red mouth, dimpled her round, smooth cheeks, and lurked in the velvety brownness of her innocent eyes. The ball-room and the reception rooms were bowers of fragrant bloom, the halls, and corridors, and splendid apartments, all richly renovated, quivered with light, and the sweet air shook with music, while among lovely, and noble, and richly clad guests, gleaming in ancestral jewels, moved none lovelier than the Bride of Leigh.

But suddenly her sensitive soul caught a new alarm. She was standing near a refined, elderly lady, of good family and moderate means, who had been introduced to her as Miss Whately. Violet, with her natural instinct of making herself agreeable, was giving a few of her sweet looks and words to the stranger, when she said:

"All of us in this immediate neighborhood are rather old to be your companions, Lady Leigh, but I expect to have with me, in a day or two, my niece, Miss Ambrose, and I hope you will enjoy her society; she is beautiful and accomplished. Lord Leigh, I believe, knows her well."

Had a serpent started up from the floor at her feet Violet could not have felt a sharper start of fear. Miss Ambrose! The name was wedded to the agony of that wretched hour when Leigh's faithlessness had been revealed to her. Violet, as all those with a strong craving for universal love and commendation, was of a jealous nature.

She had heard of the marvelous, and to her, fatal beauty of the rector's daughter; and now they would be set face to face.

During the first few days after the return, Lord Leigh escorted the bride over all his estates. On horseback or in the landau, they viewed farms, villages, dower houses, mill properties, churches, school-houses, cottages, moorlands, running streams, great corn-lands. Everywhere, at leafy lane or rosy covert, or daisy-strewn dell, or village street, Violet looked for the fair woman whom she feared, and found her not.

Not thus was Norman Leigh to meet her who only had roused in his selfish heart some semblance of true love.

But one summer evening, on the verge of his estates, beyond the deer park, as he lounged idly along alone, he saw the sunset falling between the beach stems and illuminating a slender shape in white, a face heavenly fair uplifted as she listened to a bird's vespers; the glory of her hair falling like a golden shower over her shoulders, lips parted, and white hands raised as a sibyl's, her little foot poised on the velvet sod, seeming hardly of this earth earthy, and, alas, to his utter ruin, his whole soul went forth to worship at her altar.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I WILL NOT HAVE HER UNDER MY ROOF."

When, two years before, Norman had first met Edna Ambrose, and for a year had followed her as a lover, his heart had been distracted by the passion for play, and the terrible and dangerous position in which it had brought him. His own jeopardy had hindered his tasting love with more than half his mind. But now, through Violet's fortune, he was freed from all debts and embarrassments; he was, for the time being, satiated with his play at Homburg, and removed from temptations to gambling in the security of Leigh Towers; and that disastrous craving for excitement, usually centered on the green table, now leaped forth in the direction of a renewed and intensified passion for Miss Ambrose.

In the year since he had seen her, Miss Ambrose had

indeed increased in beauty, arriving at a wonderful perfection of loveliness, which a little later made her famous in all England.

She stood there "under the greenwood tree," quite unconscious of the nearness of her former lover—calm, sweet, serenely happy, angelically good, and as he looked at her a mighty whirlwind of passion swept over him and carried him away. How it came to pass he did not know. He had always preferred her to others, and her image dwelt apart in his soul, as an inestimable, resigned good. He had preferred her to others, but not to himself. Now his whole heart was at her feet with a reckless adoration that would give himself and all that he had for her, and she was a good no longer resigned, but furiously longed for.

He had lounged down along that woodland walk, idle, careless, bored by his safe, tranquil environment; and in one wild instant, by one look, volcano fires had been kindled, heart, soul, brain, burned in maddening flame. In five short minutes, the heavens and the earth had changed for him; he turned deadly white, his frame trembled, an ardor of love seized and enthralled him; that celestial face, half turned away, dazzled his eyes like the glory of the sun. As many another man since the world began, looking on a woman's face, he went wild, mad for it, and swayed by fierce passions, and dominated by bitter pain, both the pain and passion to be his until the terrible end, he gazed, panting, fascinated on that peerless face.

Absolutely, for the instant, he could neither move nor speak to break the mighty spell that held him.

The bird's song ceased; Edna, with a sigh of deep content, stooped to pluck a lily blooming at her feet. And then her name was uttered in a longing, ardent cry, and he sprang toward her.

"Edna, Edna!—look at me, speak to me!"

She turned, tranquil as a moon shedding glory from June night skies. She held out one white hand.

"Is it you, Norman—Lord Leigh? Welcome home, and many wishes for happiness in your new life."

"Is that all you can say to me, Edna?" he gasped, in a stifled voice.

"All? What more could I say, since I have not seen your wife? But then I have heard of her—that she is all

that is fair, and innocent, and sweet. She will make your life happy, I am sure."

"Once," burst out Norman Leigh, "the dream of my life was to be happy with you! Oh, Edna, what shall I say?"

"You need say nothing," said Edna, looking at him with calm eyes of heavenly blue. "I did not hold you bound. You say truly—it was a dream. It has passed, and we are both awake, both content."

"How can I tell you?—how explain?" faltered Leigh.

"Do not try," said Edna. "My father forbade an engagement, until you could have time to know your mind. He was right, as he always was; and when you knew your mind, it was for this lovely lady whom you have married. Do not think you owe me any apologies. My father was more than right; our rank was too unequal, and I was too young. I, too, woke to know I did not really love——"

"Not love me, Edna?" cried Norman, passionately.

"Not with a love that should last a life; but as a friend, a sister, I can care for you still. To me, you and your fate will ever be dear, and I hope your wife also will be dear to me. Is not that well?"

She gave him her hand, with an angelic smile.

The cool, calm touch of that dainty palm recalled Leigh to himself. He was a man wonderfully skilled in controlling an exhibition of his emotions. Habituated to wear a mask, he now swiftly realized that he must hide from Edna this fury of love for her, or with indignant wrath she would drive him from her forever.

With iron force he crushed down his emotions, and so mastered himself that he could hold that lovely little hand quietly in his own and say:

"I have no words to thank you for your graciousness and forgiveness. If you scorned and hated me, you would feel only what I feel for myself, added to the bitter assurance that in you I lost the sole hope of the happiness of my life. I cannot tell you how I was driven on, by what difficulties dragged into a seeming forsaking of one who will forever hold a sacred place in my heart. Your kindness now restores me more of happiness than I ever expected to know again."

"You were not pledged to me," said Edna; "and do you know, as I have grown in years and experience since

we met, I think the love I had for you was but a child's fancy, after all? Let me be your sister, Norman, and we shall better than reach our early dream."

He bent to kiss the white, warm softness of the little hand she extended, and the touch thrilled him. Oh, could the future hold for him any possibility of making this divine creature his? Surely not, if now he alarmed her by proffer of forbidden passion. He must school himself to calm.

"Edna, those days we spent together in Cornwall are the blessed memories of my life."

"They were very sweet," she said. "I was a lonely girl, and it was so charming to have a friend like you, liking all I liked, giving me glimpses of a wider world."

"Let us renew those days here in Sussex," he said. "We can renew the friendship and intercourse of the past. You shall be again my lovely friend."

"And your wife's," said Edna.

"Yes. We are to have some friends at the Towers. I want a gay, bright party, full of joy and good-will. You will join them as our guest, will you not? You will have books, music, poetry, flowers, pictures, all that you love. We will crowd the days with festivities and rural excursions. You will not refuse me, Edna?"

"Certainly not, when your wife invites me. I should enjoy it of all things. I am resolved to love her."

"She will come to see you at once," said Leigh.

To him the sound of Edna's voice, the glance of her eyes, was a heaven undreamed of before. He thought he should be entirely happy meeting her in the daily life of his home. It remained but to cover his mad wish for her presence by inviting a party.

Next day he said to Violet:

"I fear we shall grow dull here. I need stimulus—society. Let us ask Tom Churchill and Grace Fanshaw for a visit."

"Oh, I shall be so glad to have them," said Violet.

"And Keith and his mother."

"No, no," said Violet, in afright. "No, they cannot come. They must stay at the castle for a while."

"All right. We must have some one to matronize the party. You are too young for a chaperon. What do you say to giving a welcome here to your Aunt Ainslie and your cousins?"

"I would like that," said Violet, with grateful memories of her loving aunt.

"And Lady Jane, and Gore, and Sir Hugh Hunter; and, Violet, let us ask Lady Clare, and my Cousin Hartington, and make a match between them."

Violet laughed.

"He hates you and she hates me."

"So much more likely to love each other, then. He is rich. Set them down on your list. We need one more. I want you to call on and invite a nice young lady from near here—Miss Ambrose."

Violet started as if a thunderbolt had fallen. Her whole soul rose up in arms, and she cried, wildly:

"I will not have that woman in my house!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"NO! TEN TIMES NO!"

A white fury came into Norman Leigh's face at his wife's emphatic words. Until now he had been merely indifferent to her—at intervals feebly grateful—though intense selfishness, taking all things as its due, has small capacity for gratitude. But at this moment Violet came between him and his desire—between him and the woman whom he loved—and for an instant he hated her.

"What do you mean?" he cried; "for what reason do you refuse to entertain my guest?"

Violet looked down. She could not, she would not, give the real reason. She said, coldly:

"I will not entertain strangers. There are enough guests whom I know."

"But it is your duty to receive and entertain my friends in my house."

Violet looked at him fixedly.

"In this case, no; ten times no!" she said, with indignation.

"But, I tell you, Miss Ambrose *shall* be invited by you."

"Never! If you invite her, and she is so lost to good breeding as to come unasked by the lady of the house, I shall leave the house, and visit elsewhere."

"I will not permit it!" cried Leigh, stamping in fury.

“At least, you cannot make me leave my room, and I warn you I will stay there.”

They looked furiously at each other. Violet turned and ran up to her boudoir, where she locked herself in, and flung herself on a sofa, and began to cry piteously. Leigh dashed out of the library window, and betook himself to the woods, in a heat of rage, muttering bitter words.

“It was just seven weeks since these two had stood before God’s altar, with vows to love, honor, cherish, obey.

The tempest of her tears passed away; Violet began to review her conduct; she reproached herself for her methods, but believed she was right in principle. Instinctively, she felt that all these invitations were a cover to that to Miss Ambrose, and that Leigh asked Miss Ambrose because he loved her, preferred her to his wife. Rashly, perhaps not unnaturally, Violet believed that Miss Ambrose shared this love, and favored his intercourse. In such a case, the invitation was a cruel insult to herself, and the jealous, love-craving child—spoiled, perhaps, by a life-long observance of her lightest wish—felt all the bitterest grief and indignation of a wronged wife.

Never, never, never, would she have anything to do with this fatal Miss Ambrose!

But, in method, oh, how wrong she had been!

Meanwhile, Leigh, in the excess of his rage at Violet’s defiance, tore blindly through the wood, yet, by some instinct, took paths that led him from his park to a little hazel coppice, through which rippled a silver stream—a quiet nook belonging to Miss Whateley’s small property, and lying just outside her humble rose garden.

His heart had not misled him. Through the opening in the coppice lay exposed a sweep of the Sussex Wealdon, wide and bare, yet glowing in the tints of summer, and under the trees sat Edna, a block of paper on her knee, her color-box lying by her side, making a sketch of that fair perspective.

Leigh, hot and breathless, dashed through the green shelter, and, flinging himself on the turf near her feet, hid his face against the folds of her soft draperies, and cried, passionately:

“Edna, Edna, why did I leave you?”

She started with a troubled look, but, dropping her brush, laid her gentle hand on his head, saying:

"Lord Leigh, what troubles you? What is it?"

Lord Leigh reached up and seized the soft hand.

"I am rewarded for my villainy. I married her fortune. I hate my wife, and she hates me. Oh, why did I not face exposure and loss, and be a good man in the heaven of your guardianship?"

"Norman," said Edna, firmly, "if you speak such words I shall leave you, and never see you again. My wish is to help you, if I may. But I cannot listen to such words about the wife you married less than two months ago. She can have done nothing to deserve them."

"She has—she defies me—she flatly refused to invite you to our house, or make your acquaintance."

"And since when," said Edna, coolly resuming her brush, "has a lady lost the right to choose her own society?"

"But it is a wife's duty to obey and please her husband."

"As I read life," said Edna, "marriage should be a field of mutual concessions. There should be a reciprocal study of each other's tastes, and the husband, as oldest and strongest, should set this good example. Will you not tell me how my name came up, and this difficulty occurred?"

Her tranquil voice calmed Leigh's storm. He related, with only a few accidental changes, the recent discussion with Violet. Edna looked him in the eyes and smiled.

"Foolish man, cannot you see what all that means? This poor girl has heard something about my name in connection with yours—some garbled account. She is jealous, and you are angry at what is really a compliment to you—an earnest of her care for you. Let her alone about me. Do not vex her. In some way we two shall get acquainted, and I will love her, and make her love me, and I will see that she abandons this jealousy, having no cause, as you and I are but friends."

"Jealousy?" cried Leigh; "if she only knew how far below you her petty airs and contradictions make her look!"

"If you think to please me by condemning your wife," said Edna, with coldness, "you are mistaken. You will only cause me to bless heaven that I did not get a husband capable of forgetting his altar vows, and unconscious of what he owes to a woman who is one with him in his flesh and his interests."

"Edna, if you speak so coldly to me, look so coldly, you will drive me mad."

"Norman, I remember our past with kindness. I desire to be your friend, sister, helper. I cannot easily forsake old attachments. I am faithful by nature. But if you use such language to me, I shall simply cease to see you."

"I know," cried Leigh, "that you must think such words ill-fitted to a man, who, having protested love, and offered you marriage, left you suddenly, and, after two letters, gave no further sign of remembrance, and in a year reappears before you married. Only let me speak this once. My vows of love were the real language of my soul. To marry you was my one desire. But I came home here at the call of my business man, and he showed me that I had unhappily reduced my affairs to complete wreck; that my estates were abominably incumbered; and that open disgrace was inevitable within a year unless I repaired matters with a prodigious sum. Marriage with a great heiress was my one refuge. Such a marriage I made. No doubt I sinned irretrievably."

"Not irretrievably, if you make a good, faithful, tender husband to the woman to whom you owe your safety. It is open to you to repair the past and be a worthy man. We are speaking plainly, Norman. After you left me I learned that when, two years ago, you had fallen in love at first sight with me, you obtained your end by pretending to to make love to Helen Hope, my governess. You played with her for your own ends, and wrecked her life in doing so; for she really loved you. She showed me your notes and gifts, and it was that that proved to me you were not the man I could love and honor as my husband. What you tell me now deepens that assurance, because by no good means can a man ruin such a fortune as you did."

"No, it was by evil means; but you, angel of an Edna, could have saved me."

"And I can save you still," she said, bending her heavenly face toward him, and laying her hand on his shoulder. "Whatever the faults and follies of the past, let me help you to forsake them; and believe me, the first step, on the way of return, is to love and cherish this fair young bride, who has no shelter but your heart."

Norman Leigh kissed her hand; she thought in acquiescence. It was acquiescence compelled only by the assurance

that if he did not seem to take the path of honor he must no more look on Edna Ambrose. And his whole soul cried out that he could not live away from her blessed presence—that rather than part from her he would die at her feet.

“Make peace with your wife, drop me from your discussions, and leave me to meet, and know, and win the love of Lady Leigh in my own fashion.”

Under bonds of his instruction, Leigh met Violet at dinner. She was pale and subdued, resolved but remorseful. He took the initiative.

“Have you written those invitations, Violet?”

“No; I did not know they were concluded on.”

“Let us write them after dinner, in the library?”

“I know I spoke too hastily this morning. I should have refused in some better way. I was very unamiable.”

“So it appeared to me. But, of course, I don’t wish to govern your invitations. I don’t care a rush who comes or stays away.”

Violet felt intensely ashamed. This remark set her clearly in the wrong. She blushed and faltered:

“I have been spoiled, I fear, Norman. I speak too hastily.”

“Well, never mind. I dare say we are not of natures to live like two doves. Most matches have such differences in them. People, I fancy, don’t usually marry the ones best suited to them. We’ll rub on as easily as we can.”

The invitations were written; but heavily on Violet’s soul lay Lord Leigh’s estimate of marriage, and the assurance of her own irreparable mistake, and her own forlorn condition.

CHAPTER XXV.

“YOU ARE THE HAPPIEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD.”

A gray, elderly man, bowed as much with care as with age, was walking along a lane of the village of Leigh, when he heard the sound of a step on the turf behind him, and turned to see a gracious figure in blue cambric, a wide faille hat, trimmed with grass and daisies, and carrying a little basket. Recognition was mutual.

“Why, Adam!” cried the girl.

"Miss Ambrose!" faltered the old man.

"You seemed in a brown study, Adam. I hope nothing is wrong with you?"

"It is the old story, Miss Ambrose—worry for my master. You know how it was in Cornwall. I had the care of a father rather than a servant. I've watched all his life."

"Yes; I saw him the other day, Adam."

"Did you, madam?" cried Adam, eagerly.

"And told him how happy I hoped he would be."

Adam saw no shadow of regret on the lovely, tranquil face. Sweet peace looked out of the sunny blue eyes, framed in the wreath of golden hair.

"But he is *not* happy, Miss Ambrose," said Adam. "I speak out to you, because of the old time. I hoped things would go differently then, and he would find some one to save him. But it is not my lady's fault; a sweeter, more innocent, forgiving young creature never lived. He has gone to London alone for two days, he says, and to bring back her aunt and cousins to see her. But I have no peace till I see him again. It is like old times to meet you tripping about with your little basket of good things to sick or poor, as you did in your father's parish."

So Lord Leigh was absent! This, then, was a time when Edna might venture in his grounds and try to meet the lonely little wife. If they only could meet, she trusted to the mutual youth and tastes in common to bring them together. Edna Ambrose never met any one who turned coldly from her lovely face and sweet, earnest manner.

That very afternoon she set out for a walk in Leigh Woods. Nearer and nearer the house she would draw—perhaps she would find the deserted mistress of the establishment. Turning about a little wooded knoll where a cluster of beech trees cast a goodly shade, Edna saw a scarlet hammock swinging low between two trees, and beside it, sitting stiffly erect, a great mastiff—one of the famous dogs of Leigh. He held himself immovable, like a cast-iron dog set up in a garden in some excess of ill taste; but as Edna came softly near he wagged his tale a few times, by way of recognition. All dogs loved Miss Ambrose.

In the hammock lay a slender figure, dressed in white pique, trimmed with Irish point and scarlet knots of ribbon. Violet was asleep. Her long, dark lashes swept her

flushed, dimpled cheek; the brown rings of her hair were damp with the dews of slumber; her pretty, pathetic mouth, curved now for a smile, now for a sigh.

Edna, looking at her child-like beauty, longed to gather her to her heart and implore her to be happy. She felt singularly drawn to this helpless lovely creature. Surely they could be friends, and she could help her in her perilous, thorny way.

But a cloud moved across the face of the dreaming Violet; her red lips quivered.

"You don't love me," she sobbed. "You never loved me!"

Edna drew back. She could not, a stranger, intrude on the unconscious revelations. Then Violet's hands were held out, as if searching for help, and she cried:

"I dare not see you—I love you too well, my——"

But Edna had stepped hastily beyond hearing of those murmurs. She did not wish to know of Violet more than the girl-wife voluntarily told her. As she withdrew into the wood, Kate, who had been for work, or a book, hastily returned, and her rushing step roused her mistress.

Miss Ambrose feeling that Kate's presence would disturb the freedom of the interview she desired with Violet, withdrew, determined to find the little countess next day.

But not the next day, nor for months after, did those two meet. During these months Edna carried in her heart a memory of the pretty young creature, tossing, and murmuring of her troubles, in her sleep.

In spite of the fears of Violet, and of old Adam, Lord Leigh returned home safely, after two days, bringing with him Mrs. Ainslie and four of her girls, their plans for a lengthened stay on the Continent having been abandoned in fear of an epidemic in Italy.

Violet had feared that vexation at her refusal to receive Miss Ambrose might drive Norman back to his gaming-table, and she received him in the relief of her feelings with considerable affection.

"I knew you would be a model couple," said Mrs. Ainslie, beaming her joy, as Violet ran to embrace Lord Leigh.

Neither of them guessed that a fair face in a glory of golden hair, the hope of hearing the melodious tones of a voice that had once spoken in love to him, of clasping a hand which voluntarily he had resigned, had brought Lord

Leigh home. The very coolness of Edna, and the frankness with which she condemned him, were added charms in the eyes of the young peer whose love advances had never been before coldly met by any one.

The first real satisfaction of her married life came to Violet when she acted the part of hostess to her aunt and cousins, who arrived a few days before the other guests. Their unbounded admiration of her splendid home, Mrs. Ainslie's awed rapture in the portrait gallery, where many generations of Leighs looked from the walls, wiled Violet from her sadness.

They spent two or three days in looking at everything and exclaiming in admiration.

"Violet," cried Anna Ainslie, "you are the happiest woman in the world."

None of them thought that, possessed of such splendors, she could be otherwise than happy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOST TO HIM FOREVER MORE.

One by one the visitors gathered at Leigh Towers. Grace Fanshaw came, all eagerness to see her favorite friend, and to find that the omens of the wedding-day had proved false. Tom Churchill came, Grace being his lode-star, resolved to lay his heart and hand, and all that was his, at her feet before they left the romantic environs of the Towers. Colonel Hartington came, for the first time in years. In fact, the first time since he had quarreled with the late Lord Leigh, Hartington accusing young Norman of cheating at billiards, and thrashing him therefor.

But before many days the keen eyes of Colonel Hartington and the motherly orbs of Mrs. Ainslie saw that all was not right between the young couple. So did others.

Colonel Hartington noticed the coolness of the married pair—the shy sorrow of Violet, the indifference of Leigh—and hugged himself with the thought that he might be Earl of Leigh yet.

But Mrs. Ainslie, direct of nature, went straight to Leigh.

"You and Violet are not so happy as I thought you

were. I'm afraid you don't understand the dear child. She looks sad and lonely. No one can make up to a young woman for her husband. I fear you don't pet her enough. She is used to being made much of."

"Yes, I see she is a deal spoiled, and fond of her own way. She set herself up against some visitors I wanted, for one thing. And I don't like these martyr airs, for my part. If a lady has dislikes, she should keep them to herself. Perhaps you had better speak to her, to have a little more aplomb and dash—something beside those sudden starts and blushes, and wet eyes and longing looks."

"Do you mean I am to find fault with Violet? I would not, for the world. I never did in my life."

"Not if she deserved it?"

"Certainly not. To begin, I would not believe she deserved it," said the loyal aunt.

"A man must be master in his own house," said Leigh. "I wanted to ask a Miss Ambrose, and Violet flatly refused to have her."

"Why, that's odd. Is she afraid of too many guests? Now, I wanted Lady Burton and Keith, and she refused me, too. I wanted to bring Keith and Anna together. You see the entire responsibility of these girls is on my hands. Mr. Ainslie says he cannot take care of girls' affairs; he only knows ledgers and the markets."

"See, now," said Leigh, always fond of intriguing for what he wanted. "I'll try and manage to bring Keith and his mother here, and you must do as much for Miss Ambrose. She's in the neighborhood, and you'll make her acquaintance. I suppose the only trouble is a little jealousy."

"Violet's mother was rather sensitive and queer, but I laid it to her blue blood, and I supposed you'd know how to manage such notions in Violet," said poor Mrs. Ainslie.

But while these two were negotiating to betray her into receiving undesired guests, Violet, surrounded by the bright faces of her friends, her lately lonely home filled with laughter and song, returned herself to the smiles and cheer of six months before. Each morning she came into the breakfast-room fresh as a rose.

Yet now and then the realization that Leigh did not care for her, that she was not the one dearest to any one of those about her, that she had no strong heart on which to lean,

overcame her, and drove her from the gay group, and brought the ready tears.

Grace Fanshaw found her thus in the conservatory, standing in the tropic warmth of the orchid house, the marvelous, many-colored flowers blooming about her, splendid but scentless, and forced as her own life.

Grace clasped her about the waist.

"Darling Violet, why are these tears in your eyes?"

Violet broke from her, and ran into the next compartment. Grace followed her, and knelt before her, clasping her arms about her again.

"Violet, tell me, are you happy?"

But Violet caught great clusters of Jacqueminot and Rothschild roses and showered the vivid, fragrant petals over her kneeling friend, with a burst of laughter; then ran into the music-room and played Strauss' waltzes in a dashing, wild way, very different from the dreamy sweetness of her usual playing. And all that day she was very merry and bright among her friends.

Grace Fanshaw forgot her fears, and was the liveliest of the group. After dinner she went out into the garden to get lilies with dew on them, "to improve her beauty," she said; "she was such a late sleeper, it was hopeless for her to think of getting morning dews." When she came in, her charming little Psyche head, with its rings of yellow hair, was shining with dew.

"Oh, mamma," she cried, "feel my head!" and, bending graciously, she extended the pretty pate to the maternal touch. "Violet, feel my head, how wet it is. Mrs. Ainslie? I cannot leave you out of such a treat."

She was passing Lord Leigh, and full of mischief, she bowed the round-ringed crown before him.

"You, too, my lord.

With a laugh, he laid his fingers on the wet locks. His smile was full of admiration—as who could help admiring this fantastic, charming creature?

Mrs. Ainslie suddenly awoke to a foolish fear. She went to Violet's room that night, and said, anxiously:

"Why do you have that pretty, gay Grace here? I believe she is trying to flirt with your husband. You must look more to him, Violet. I'm sure he is getting in love with some one."

"Not *getting*?" said Violet, turning white. "It is done,

but it is not Grace Fanshaw. There, aunt, never speak of this again. I can bear my own burden till it kills me."

Poor Mrs. Ainslie cried heartily most of the night, and left her room late next day. Instead of finding Violet and her household shrouded in gloom, the good woman in the corridor met a "rabble rout" nearly as motley as that in Comus. The entire party were dressed in the ancient treasures of the Towers—court and wedding-suits of Lords and Dames of Leigh.

Violet's hair was done *a la* Pompadour, and she wore a short-waisted, pillow-sleeved, long-trained robe of purple velvet, trimmed in gold lace. Grace Fanshaw was in the dimmed glories of a maid of honor of Elizabeth. Lord Leigh wore the black velvet suit in which one of his line went to welcome William of Orange. And Tom Churchill strutted about in the guise of a Leigh who went to France to convey over the luckless Henrietta. Others had come out in garments of different ages, and a troop of butterflies could not be brighter than they, as the sunshine poured over them when they rushed out on the terraces.

A week of this masquerading and other entertainments, and one day Violet chanced to wander off alone toward the grand entrance gates.

Along that very walk came swinging, with great, eager strides, Kenneth Keith.

Violet's eyes were downcast, her heart absorbed in musing. Kenneth saw her from afar in the flecking sunshine. This slender shape, silken and slippered, the trailing iris robe held up in one delicate hand, the head drooping a little on one side as a flower on its stem, soft perfumes stealing about her as she came—this was she, his Violet; but no, not his; gone into other and such unworthy keeping. Lost to him forevermore.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THESE WORDS ARE AN INSULT TO ME."

An open landau whirled past Lord Keith, and at the noise of wheels Violet looked up and met the loving smile of her friend Lady Burton. All her terror at seeing mother or son vanished at the sight of one who loved her so ten-

derly and purely, and as the carriage stopped, and the footman let down the steps, Violet sprang into Lady Burton's arms.

"My sweet child," said Lady Burton, gazing fondly at the lovely roseate face, "I rejoice to see you looking so bright and well. Your husband wrote to me to come—said he thought you needed me—that you were not very well, and were gloomy."

"He was very kind to write to you. I did not know of it. This is all a surprise to me—a delightful surprise—but you need not have believed that about my health, for I am always well."

"Lord Leigh invited both myself and my son—I wrote you that Kenneth had returned—and Kenneth at first refused to come; but as I said I would not come without him, and we feared that you needed me, he came. Where is he? He walked from the gates. Oh, here, behind the carriage. My son, come and be presented to Lady Leigh,"

Kenneth Keith stood upon the step of the landau; they were in a false position, but it was Violet's place to speak. Violet held out her hand, her face crimson; it was at Lady Burton she looked.

"We have met before; he was in Paris when we were, and——"

"Oh, that is delightful! I hope you liked each other."

"I had seen him before, too," said Violet, bravely, "and remembered him; and Leigh asked him to meet us in Switzerland."

"And we came to Dover in the same steamer," said Keith.

"So, you see, we are old friends," added Violet; and Keith took his place opposite her, and she sat by his mother's side, and so they drove up to the entrance, and so they might have sat if they had been man and wife, and not two cruelly sundered hearts.

Lord Leigh had gone out on the terrace to wait for the landau which he had sent privately to the station, and meant to go and surprise Violet by his announcement of the arrivals. To his astonishment, she rode up with them, holding Lady Burton's hand, smiling and happy.

"See what I did for your gratification," he whispered, as the party alighted.

"Thank you—you are very good, Norman," she said, softly.

"Then remember to be equally good to me."

"I want to be good," she said, looking wistfully into his eyes; won't you help me—help me all the time, Norman?"

She pressed his arm gently with her little hand, and then took Lady Burton up to the rooms which the housekeeper at Lord Leigh's order had made ready.

All her gracious little duties as hostess—she left weightier matters to the housekeeper—the constant diversions devised by the young people, her own honest efforts to fix her thoughts and attentions on Norman and distract them from Kenneth, served to occupy and quiet the mind of the lovely little Countess of Leigh. It was Keith who suffered most during that visit at the Towers.

The next day the indefatigable Mrs. Ainslie had arranged for the young people an excursion including a picnic in a supposed Druidical ruin. Anna rode well, and Anna and Keith, Grace and Churchill, Violet and Leigh were to ride, and the elders to go in a landau. Just at the last minute, Leigh proclaimed that "he had a beastly headache and would not go," and so sent his horse back to the stables. Keith, therefore, was left to escort Violet and Anna.

The five on horseback reached the appointed spot, but no carriages appeared with their seniors, servants, or provisions. Suddenly a great black cloud came tearing across the sky, and a tremendous crash of thunder woke the echoes. Violet's timid, nervous Arabian, which being gentle had been left with the rein simply thrown over a furze bush, while the party made the pilgrimage of the ruins, flung up its slender head, with a shrill cry, and darted away, almost as swift as the lightning that followed the peal.

Then the rain of that summer gust began to pour down. The five desolate equestrians endeavored to save themselves by crawling under the shelter of that three-legged stone table, called by courtesy a Druidical Altar, where in some fashion they might be sheltered.

Tom Churchill, with a fine prevision of accidents, had carried a large soft Mexican poncho rolled up behind his saddle, and he wrapped this about Grace and Anna, and

sat at their feet holding it, while the wicked wind and rain swirled in upon them, ruining Grace's plumed hat, and reducing her yellow head to a state of detestable wetness.

Keith had his own blue cloth cloak with him, and wanted to put it on Violet, but she shrank sensitively from it, and utterly refused.

In a short time, from soaking rain and nervous excitement, she was blue and chilled, and her teeth began to chatter, while her lips grew white.

"Lord Keith," cried Grace, imperatively, "don't heed Violet's words a second more, or she will die on your hands with a congestive chill. For pity's sake, look at the child! Are you afraid to touch her? Wrap her up, and hold her tight in your arms, till she stops shaking. What are you thinking of?"

Kenneth turned to Violet in sudden terror. How frail, and cold, and exhausted she looked! Obeying Grace's commands, he folded the big plaid round and round Violet's slender, shrinking, wet figure, and held her closely in his arms, drawing her almost unconscious head to the rest of his breast. She was too terrified and exhausted to remonstrate, for she had a constitutional terror of thunder-storms. Held closely protected, she began to grow warmer, and a faint color stole into her face.

But the summer gust was over. The sun came out, the luncheon hour was long gone by, and no signs of the landau party.

"Something has happened to them," said Grace. "We must go back. No doubt we shall pick up their bones along the road."

"But I have no horse," said Violet.

"We must resort to ancient days, fair Chatelaine," said Keith. "My plaid, folded, shall make a pillow for you, and you must ride behind me on my gallant roan."

"I'd—rather ride behind—Anna," faltered Violet.

"My goodness!" screamed Anna. "I wouldn't for the world. Both our necks would be broken!"

So the plaid was folded, and Violet rode home with her arms clasped about Keith, in such a terror of falling that she never knew how close was the pressure of her arms.

By night the party of the broken landau came ignominiously home, in gigs hired at a country inn.

And where had Leigh been on that eventful day?

No sooner had the plumes of the riders, and the parti-colored parasols of the landau disappeared along the road, than his headache disappeared with them, and he made straight for the little villa of Miss Whately.

The sound of a piano, softly played, led his steps to a window opening to the ground, and draped within with white lace, and without with climbing roses in abundant bloom. In the cool and shaded apartment the graceful figure of Edna Ambrose, and the golden glory of her hair were seen.

Leigh stood watching her for a few moments, until the mysterious consciousness of a fixed gaze drew the player to turn around, and she rose.

"Is Miss Whately at home? I have not had time until now to call upon my old friend," said Leigh, smoothly.

"My aunt went to London this morning," replied Edna.

That was no news to Lord Leigh. It was the accidental hearing that Miss Whately had been seen buying a ticket for London at the station that morning which had given him his suddenly cured headache, and turned his feet toward Rose Lodge. When Edna answered him, he dropped uninvited into a chair, leaned back his head among the cushions, and said:

"How cool, and calm, and sweet it is here! so very much better than the Towers, with its lively crowd. Did you not meet some of our visitors the other day?"

"Yes; a most charming elderly lady; she saw me sketching; and, though I am shy of strangers, she won me before I was aware. And then her son came up—a very handsome young man—a kingly Saxon. He should sit as a model for King Alfred's youth."

Leigh ground his teeth with rage.

"Don't speak so!" he cried. "He may be dancing attendance on my wife, but I cannot hear *you* praising him. It drives me mad!"

"I do not understand you," said Edna, coldly. "May not a *mere friend* praise whom she pleases? And if he attends too closely on your wife, is it not that you abandon her to any attention that may come her way? Why are you not with that lovely young wife this minute?"

"Because I wanted to see you; because your voice is as music of heaven, and your face an angel's to me. Oh, Edna, how much rather would I be living with you in such

a sweet, quiet home as this, than lord it at the Towers! Why, why have I lost you?"

A noble indignation crimsoned Edna's face, and anger leaped from her blue eyes.

"These words are an insult to me. Leave me, Lord Leigh, and never venture into my presence again."

But while they had been speaking the sky had darkened, and now the thunder and lightning and flooding rain—which later in the morning swept on the party at the Druid ruins—broke over Rose Lodge.

"You will not drive me out in the storm, will you?" said Leigh.

"No; but I can leave this room to you until the weather permits your departure."

She turned, offended, queenly; but Leigh, in a tempest of passion, flung himself at her feet, and seized her white robe in his eager, trembling hands.

"Edna, do not leave me to ruin and despair! Stay where I can see you. Has love no claim? Does grief deserve no pity? Oh, cruel heart, to be deaf to love like mine!"

He forgot how he had coldly scorned and rejected the equally passionate love of Helen Hope for himself.

"Listen to me, Lord Leigh," said Edna. "Less than three months the husband of the sweetest of women, your free choice, whose acceptance has saved you from ruin, you dare insult *me* with protestations of your love! Heaven knows I never expected to fall so low as to hear such a shameful appeal as this! Every word you speak shows me that God was good when He kept me from being your wife. Listen. I shall leave this place, and go where I cannot see you or hear you. My indignation at you is only equaled by my compassion for your wife. If ever we meet again, it will only be because I see some way of helping and comforting her. I have always loved art, and now that I have an ample fortune from my uncle, and from him a changed name, I shall go and pursue art with all my soul. For you, Norman, go and repent."

She wrested her garments from his grasp, and, darting from the room, closed the door behind her.

When he heard her fleet foot running up the stair, he dashed out in the storm, and, drenched and bare-headed, fled back to the Towers, and locked himself in his own apartment. His rebuffed love consumed him as a frenzy.

Three days passed—days in which Leigh was sullen and retired, because he learned, through Adam's chat, about the loss to the cottage people, that Miss Ambrose had gone away, not expecting to return.

"And they do say," continued Adam, "though, she's not married, her name is changed, and she is Haviland, taking her uncle's name, with his fortune."

During these days Lady Clare arrived, and Colonel Hartington began to pay her attentions, which were amiably received.

"I don't believe Leigh will live three years," said Lady Clare, calmly regarding her former suitor, and summing up his life chances. "He looks consumed by some inward fury or fever. "I may be Countess Leigh yet."

Grace and Sir Tom were also absorbed in each other. Grace had said "Yes," and she and Sir Tom seemed floating round in a heaven of happiness, like a pair of triumphant gods borne on rosy clouds.

Violet was left usually to Kenneth Keith, with the simpering, undiscerning Anna for a third, about like a dummy at a game of cards.

Very often Violet fled away, and left Keith to endure Anna's smiles, and platitudes, and serene silences, alone. On such occasions she walked in the plantations by herself; and Keith, in terror lest some evil overtake her, would follow her ignorantly, and he himself her greatest danger. He found her so one day, sitting on a mossy bank, from which a beautiful wood-path opened.

The pain she felt at seeing him stung Violet to brief anger.

"Why did you follow me? Why do you always follow me? I love to be alone."

"It seems so lonesome, and perhaps hardly safe for you."

"Not safe? Surely there can be no danger here and by day?"

"Certainly not," admitted Keith, "but it looks—so *forlorn!*"

"And if I wish to be forlorn?—if it is my destiny?" cried Violet. "I hate being always followed. My aunt, and grandmother, and governess, always did it. Why are you acting just like them? Stay with Anna, and let me alone."

"It is not prudent—nor proper," began Keith, offended that his society was so evidently odious.

"It is a pity if I do not know what is prudent and proper, when I am nearly nineteen," said Violet, contumaciously. "I am going to walk up this path, and *I am going by myself!*" and she rose, and walked her chosen way.

Keith did not follow her. He sat plaiting grass, and writhing with rage and mortification. He did not know exactly what amount of guardianship a pretty damsel needed. But when her olive-green gown, with its fluttering ribbons, had disappeared along the path, he felt he must not be too far from her.

The path taken by Violet was deeply shaded, and on either side rose steep banks, crowned by thick copse, loved of rabbits. Lord Keith ascended the left-hand bank, and moved along above the path, but hidden by the bracken and hazel bushes. He went in deep gloom, his head bent, his heart sore, and temper irritated,

Violet pursued her elected path—finding it, for all its beauty, anything but pleasant. She had never been so unhappy in her life. The cruel bitterness hidden in her young heart sent a mist of tears across her wide, innocent eyes, and the woe welled over and ran down the pink and dimpled cheeks.

Both the honest young creatures were miserable following their divided ways.

Finally Violet came to a granite column, almost as high as her shoulder. It had been a milestone years ago, when this lane was a frequented bridle-path. The top of the stone was covered with lichens, and a great striped snail was crawling over it. Violet stopped, with her hand on the stone, looking at its minute life of lichens and beetles—but seeing nothing clearly.

Then she heard a fearful noise, between a howl, a cry, and a roar, and, looking up, saw a terrible creature rushing toward her. An enormous man, with ragged red hair and beard flying to the winds—eyes blood-shot, red, scintillating under bushy brows, a great row of white teeth, like fangs, glittering in his open mouth, head and feet bare, his body naked from the waist up—coming with long leaps, his arms held high, and both hands grasping the handle of a large

hatchet! This appalling figure whirled down upon the pallid little countess, screaming:

“Die! witch, die!”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“WHY DID YOU NOT LET ME DIE?”

Thus, like Iphigenia, with a “bright death glittering at her throat,” Violet saw no more.

She was dimly conscious of a rush and crash in the bushes, that she was seized by the shoulder and flung back, and that before and above her, between her and death, stood the form of Kenneth Keith.

In an instant, not being given to swooning, Violet collected herself to see the unarmed but well-knit figure of Lord Keith planted in the narrow space between herself and the maniac. Keith’s arms were crossed, his head thrown back; his eyes, steadfast and commanding, held the reluctant gaze of the man who through rum-madness had become a beast. How long he could so have dominated him cannot be told.

Three men came dashing down the road, the first on horseback, who, suddenly flinging a broad leather band over the insane creature’s shoulders, jerked it back with a buckle, and had him firmly pinioned, the hatchet dropping at his feet.

“It’s Saunders, the smith, my lord,” cried one of the men. “He’s clean and forever out of his head along of drink. He got away from us while we was watching for this keeper to come carry he to ’sylum. He might have been the death of you and Lady Leigh.”

Lord Keith said not a word; the peril to Violet had been so awful and imminent that he needed time to collect himself.

Violet, still lying almost breathless on the turf, and unable to believe in her sudden danger and escape, saw the three men carry off the shouting and rebelling Saunders, his burly strength, nurtured in the smithy, and now intensified by madness, threatening to overpower his captors.

When he was finally taken round a turn in the road, Violet lifted herself up and shook the dust from her

dress. She did not see that Keith was pale and trembling so he could not even assist her; she only felt that she owed him her life, and she remembered that he had looked dangerously magnificent, standing before her and daring death for her sweet sake. Instead of gratitude, the wayward child was filled with rebellion, and her first articulate cry was:

"Why did you not let me die? I should by this time be done with it."

This base thanklessness stung Kenneth Keith to a pale fury. He simply stood and looked at her.

Violet rushed on in her excitement:

"I am not happy; I would rather be dead!"

But this hard injustice was foreign to her really sweet nature, and with the words on her lips, she took shame to herself for them. Dead? All her warm young life brutally put out in its dawn? And he—he might now be lying a bleeding corpse, smitten to death in her defense. She repented.

"Oh, Lord Keith! what am I saying? You risked your life for *me*! You might have been killed in my place!"

"I did my duty," said Keith, in freezing tones.

"It is a pity you did."

"Why are you so averse to living?" cried Keith, in a fury.

"Because I am so unhappy," said Violet, bitterly.

"If you consider yourself unhappy, pray what am I?" said Keith, forgetting himself in foolish anger at Violet's contradictory conduct.

"I don't know what I think," said Violet, bursting into a flood of tears; "only we can neither of us live forever; you and I will both be dead some day, and that is all we have to look for."

The wide, earnest gaze that Violet had for a moment fixed on Kenneth was drowned in tears.

But only a noble, self-restrained, and trustworthy spirit looked at her out of Kenneth Keith's deep blue eyes. He stood in silence, waiting for her to grow calm; then he said:

"Dear child, I hope the life that has been saved this hour will yet be filled with goodness and happiness. Let us go home."

He took the little hand, raised her to her feet, and draw-

ing the trembling arm through his, turned their steps back toward the Towers.

The sound of voices echoed through the woodlands, and Grace, Anna, Churchill, and Captain Gore appeared. As they were heard, Keith removed Violet's hand from his arm, and, gathering a flower from the path, began to study its structure as he went on.

"Oh, are you here? Where have you been?" said Anna.

"Having an adventure," said Kenneth, coolly. "Lady Leigh was run at by a crazy man who threatened to kill her as she walked alone. I heard the noise of his threats and rushed up, but three keepers were after him, so all easily ended."

"He would surely have murdered me if Lord Keith had not come up," said Violet, pale at the recollection. "He need not make so light of it; he was very brave."

"For mercy's sake, don't tell mamma," said Anna. "We shall none of us have any peace ever after."

"Tom, since all is over safely, I wish you and I had had the adventure," said Grace, "so that it might have ended as adventures should, by conferring on the knight-errant the hand of the distressed damsel."

"If it is necessary to your happiness, perhaps I can order up a crazy man. Keith, where is he? Do you think he would be let loose by his keepers for a consideration?"

"If you had seen how horrible it was," said Violet, "you could not jest over the affair. Just the thought of it makes me sick. Captain Gore, will you give me your arm to the house? Anna, I will leave you to entertain the knight-errant."

"That is a good name for Keith," said Captain Gore. "He is one of the manliest of men."

The clock over the distant dairy struck.

"Why, it is past lunch-time," cried Violet.

"Did you not know it? We had come from lunch. If you and Leigh had been off together, we could say, 'the presence of the beloved had made the time short.'"

Violet flushed. Should the time ever come when evil tongues should make such flings about her and Keith. No, no; forbid it, Heaven! She was yet where she was safe, and she would assure her safety.

"Thank you for bringing me to the house," she said to Captain Gore. "I shall go to my room until dinner."

She looked so wan and weary when she reached her room that Kate brought her a cup of tea, and then brushed out her silken rings of dark hair, and tied them back with a ribbon, and put on her white pique dressing-robe.

"Now, leave me until time to dress for dinner," Violet said to Kate. "Do up my cream-colored silk with rose ribbons. I shall wear it to-night. And get me pink geraniums from the conservatory to wear with it."

When Kate was shut up with her sewing, Violet stole softly from her room to the apartment of Lady Burton.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"HE IS THE ONE LOVE OF MY LIFE."

"Come," said Lady Burton, in response to Violet's faint knock.

She was lying on her sofa resting, and when the door swung open, and showed the little Countess of Leigh, pale as a snow-drop, clad in white, dark, nervous rings under her sweet brown eyes, the motherly arms of her friend were held out to her, and Violet, with a cry, sprang forward, and hid her face on the bosom of the one who truly loved her.

Lady Burton softly stroked the silken hair, murmuring:

"My darling, my dear little girl, what is grieving you?"

With shrinking shame and sensitive self-scorn, Violet had been hiding her miserable story in her heart, and wearing smiles and cheerfulness, even in her saddest hours, until she had deceived Lady Burton herself. The hour for reserve was passed; her womanly sense told her that safety now lay in this friend and counselor; but her only answer for a time was wretchedly sobbing in Lady Burton's arms.

"What is it?" said Lady Burton, caressingly. "What has troubled the lovely little chatelaine of the Towers? Have titles, and fortune, and happiness oppressed you, Violet?"

"Happiness! Oh, Lady Burton, I am the most miserable woman in the world. Who could be so wretched as I am?"

"Dear child, how little, it seems to me, you know of sorrow? What can I do for you, my darling?"

"You can go away. Oh, go, please go; leave the Towers this day, this hour."

"Violet, have I grieved you in any way, that you wish me to leave you?"

"You? Oh, no, Lady Burton; you only in all the world have seemed like a real mother to me. But you must go. Go, and take Lord Keith with you. Let me never see him again. Never, never! Lady Burton, take him away, I beseech you! I cannot endure the torture of his presence. He is the one love of my life; and—oh, I am married to another—to love Kenneth is a sin."

Lady Burton turned deathly pale. She took Violet by the shoulders and held her back, scrutinizing the white, tear-wet face.

"What!" she cried; "has my son, whom I have reared to be the soul of honor, come to his friend's house and employed his time in making love to his friend's wife?"

"No, no! Do not blame him; it is not Kenneth; it is all my fault, not his—only mine."

"I do not understand. My poor child, what is this? Have you given your heart so easily, in these less than three weeks?"

"Do not look at me so, Lady Burton. Help me, pity me. It is not in these weeks only that I have seen him. But four years ago—four years! for such six happy weeks, as never were lived anywhere else out of heaven. I knew him in Lincolnshire, and we loved, and promised each other to be true, and we were parted, and my grandmother came between, and made me think him false. Oh, Lady Burton, how weak and faithless in Kenneth was my heart. I did not see him again until I was married. And I found he had loved me, and hoped for me, all that time. And then it was too late. I am Lord Leigh's wife, and I must be a faithful wife until I die. And Lady Burton, how can I pray God 'deliver me from temptation,' when I daily live in temptation?"

"You are right, my own, sweet, noble love. We will go. I will spare you this, at least—the presence of the man you love. Oh, how wrong it was for him to come here."

"Do not blame him, Lady Burton. From what Lord Leigh wrote, he feared I was ill and unhappy, and he could not stay away; he wanted to help me, to have you help me;

but the best help is for him to stay away. It is a comfort to me in all my sorrow to know that I have been loved by a good man like Kenneth; it makes me feel more sure of myself, and I am resolved always to try to be good and noble, so he shall feel he was not mistaken in me. But, Lady Burton, do you think I must live years and years so unhappily? Will I live to suffer as long as you and my mother did? It seems that I am not so fearfully strong that sorrow will not be able to kill me quickly."

"Dear Violet, neither grief nor joy kills the young quickly.—Do not long for death. It makes my heart ache, and you so young and fair. Who can sympathize with you as well as I can? I have lived through a most unhappy marriage; but I found comfort in doing my duty, and my child came to console me and to give me something sweet to live for."

"But I shall never have that comfort, I fear," said Violet. "I am doomed not to be best loved where I can love."

"Do not think that, dear. Your innocent life, your kindness, may be an inspiration to your husband; you may save him from evil ways, and win his love; and you know we are apt to love where we have benefited. When my Kenneth's father, on his death-bed, called me to him, and thanked me for all I had been to him, and said he had learned to appreciate and love me, then I felt repaid for what I had suffered."

"That can never be for me," said Violet, "for Lord Leigh not only does not love me, but he does love some one else. I have heard her spoken of as a wonderful beauty. She lives near here. He wanted her invited here. Only think of that! Her name is Miss Ambrose."

"Miss Ambrose?" cried Lady Burton, with a start.

"Yes. Do you know her?"

Lady Burton was silent. Violet insisted:

"Tell me—have you ever seen her?"

"Yes, I have," said Lady Burton, reluctantly.

"And what was she like?" asked Violet, timidly.

"My dear, she is heavenly fair. She looks like a good angel. I am sure she would be no source of danger or sorrow to you. She could never lure any man from duty, for if faces mean anything, hers means the noblest of minds, the purest of lives, the sweetest of natures."

"That only shows how hopeless it is for me to expect to win enough of love or gratitude to have any influence. I must go through life lonely as I am. Oh, say that it will not last long!"

"Dear, that will be as Heaven wills!"

"After to-day I may never see you again much," said Violet; "let me tell you how I love you, and how I wish I had been more under your guidance."

"But surely we will meet, as ever. You must be in London next season; you must be presented in court—that belongs to your position; and I am to present your friend, Grace, when your aunt, the Countess Montessor, presents you. You must take your place in the world, as here at the Towers, valiantly, if you mean to fight your battle well to the end. You are young; these new and changing scenes will help you."

"I don't look forward at all," said Violet; "I only take up day by day. And if I am in London, I shall meet—Kenneth."

"Not often; and believe me, you need fear no more from him. He shall help you bury a love that fate has said must die. Give us until to-morrow morning to leave. When the letters come this evening, I will announce an immediate departure, and no comment will be excited."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MOTTO OF THE KEITHS.

Violet had gone back to her room, to try and rest her aching head, and calm her wildly beating heart, and drive away the traces of tears, so that she might quietly meet her friends at dinner.

After a little time given to grief and musing on the blighted love of her son and Violet, Lady Burton went to Kenneth's room.

The young man was sitting by his table, his head bent on his hands.

His mother started as he lifted his face, and she saw how white and haggard it was.

"Mother, I was coming to your room."

"You wanted me, my dear?"

"I wished to ask you to finish your visit here alone, for

I must leave here to-night, or to-morrow morning. Help me to go away without comment."

His mother looked fixedly at him. He took her hand, and drew her toward the table near which he sat. Over it was spread a white silk kerchief. It was as if one had there hidden their dead, and sat down to weep beside the lifeless clay.

He drew away the handkerchief. There on the table lay a little sheaf of notes, tied with a pink ribbon, that had bound a young girl's hair, a curl of soft brown. Lady Burton would have recognized one of Violet's silken rings anywhere. A photograph of Violet, looking almost as now, in a white dress, with a full waist, and her hair over her shoulders; a few little trinkets.

Kenneth Keith laid his head on his mother's arm, and said, simply:

"Mother, I am making the grave of my only love."

"You love Violet! My son, she has been with me and told me all."

"She has told you all—how we met in Lincolnshire?" said Kenneth. "See, mother, there are the little notes she wrote me in those blessed days, tied with the ribbon that bound her lovely hair, the day she found me sleeping in the wood. This silver bracelet, of India work, I took from her pretty dimpled wrist, and this little ring she gave me when I left her; but she would take none from me, for fear some one should find it. Poor child, neither she nor I noticed that it was a fatal, changeful opal, like our fate! This photograph she gave me in those days, and this brown curl from her dear little head. I shall burn the letters, the ribbon, and this crumpled glove. You will give her back the bracelet and the ring. But the picture and the curl I can neither find it in my heart to return, destroy, nor keep. You must take them, mother, until the day when this grief dies out of my heart, if it ever does."

Lady Burton drew her son's head to her breast, and her tears fell on his hair like rain.

"My son," said Lady Burton, at last, the motto of the Keiths is, *Veritas Vincit*—Truth Conquers. This includes all honor. A noble fidelity to virtue shall take the sting from this most unhappy love, and bring you, in some way which now I cannot see, to assured peace. To-morrow you and I leave here together. I cannot abandon you in your

sorrow; and to Violet I should only be a reminder of lost love. I will take these treasures that you commit to me, and lay them away as sacred memorials of one dead. And you are right to burn these other mementoes."

Keith gathered up the letters, ribbon, and glove, and a faded wild rose or two, and laying them on his hearth, lit them, kneeling, grimly watching until they were consumed; as one would kneel by an altar of sacrifice.

"Kenneth," said the mother, "Violet, in addition to other grief, has the belief that her husband loves another. That very Miss Ambrose-Haviland we met in the wood."

"Such a divine creature could not have loved Leigh."

"Only when very young, and misconceiving his character. He is good-looking and plausible. But it seems to me, that in that girl, will somehow be help and comfort for Violet. I feel inclined to go and call on her, on some excuse, and see where our way will lead."

"You cannot, she has gone. I met old Adam to-day, going to some poor family, whom he told me Miss Ambrose, or Haviland, had put in his care. He had said she had left here forever."

"Gone! Then you may be sure it is from Leigh's importunities!"

"No doubt. Curse——"

"Son!" his mother laid her hand on his mouth, "Whatever you suffer, keep yourself free from evil."

Great was the sorrow expressed at the Towers, when Lady Burton announced, that evening, that she and Lord Keith must leave the next morning.

Shortly after breakfast, next day, the party at the Towers gathered on the terrace to "speed the parting guests," Keith and his mother. Lord Leigh had said good-by at the breakfast table, pleading a pressing engagement.

Violet bore up bravely to kiss her friend, Lady Burton, and give her little quivering hand to Keith. Both were deathly pale. They felt that they parted finally.

"Violet," said Kenneth, in a whisper, "I ask only one thing: If you are in any trouble, come to me as to a brother. Do you promise?"

"I shall come," said Violet, lifting her sweet eyes.

Was it a prophecy?

They were gone. Around Violet Leigh the summer day grew dark. To hide from every eye she fled into the park, to a little hidden covert that she loved. She lay there, her face buried in the green moss. Some one, hurrying madly along, almost trod on her prostrate form, yet did not see her.

It was Lord Leigh, blind with wrath and passion, coming from Rose Lodge, where he had been infuriated to find Edna gone, leaving no address.

Ten minutes later, a step that had no sound came over the mosses, and a hand touched the shoulder of the prostrate Violet.

It was Helen Hope.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“I BOW TO MY FATE.”

“Why are *you* here?” cried Violet, angered and ashamed that any eye should witness her secret grief and battle.

“Do not be angry with me,” said Helen, sitting down by her, and taking her reluctant hand. “I would like to comfort you. Do not mourn over a trifling quarrel; these things often happen, and are next day forgotten.”

“What do you mean?” said Violet. “I have not quarreled. I never quarrel.”

Violet tried to rise and go back to her home and her guests. Helen’s words had stopped the current of her woe and tears, not by consolation, but as a sharp frost stops the welling streams of the spring-time.”

“Don’t go,” said Helen, holding her fast. “I did not mean to offend you. My inference that you were crying over a quarrel was most natural, as I saw your husband going away from this little lover’s nook with a black cloud on his face.”

“My husband! He was not here.”

“Pardon me; he *was*—I saw him. I could have touched him.”

“But he has gone out from breakfast—on business.”

“Oh! So? Then perhaps it was not *you* with whom *he* quarreled, and *you* did not cause the black cloud.”

“You always puzzle me,” said Violet, fixing her ingenu-

ous eyes on Helen's handsome, dark, but secret face. "I never know just what you mean?"

"You force me to be very plain," said Miss Hope, steadily. "I consider that it is Miss Ambrose whom your husband met, and with whom he has quarreled. He has had an infatuation for her. I heard she was here, and of course they were meeting, and I came here to warn you; for, as I told you, I want to be your friend. I think you tried to be kind to me, and I am very sorry for you."

"If your feeling is so kind," said Violet, "I think your acts are very unfortunate. Surely you cannot make me more comfortable by coming to me with tales about Lord Leigh. If there are unpleasant things, that I cannot hinder, it were much better that I had not known them. I do not expect to be happy, but I should like to be at peace."

"And you would ignore your husband's unfaithfulness!"

"Hush!" said Violet, angrily. "You are now slandering. You are merely surmising. Surmise good, not evil, if you are a good woman! A man may surely renew an acquaintance without being accused of unfaithfulness."

"But what would you do if the accusation were true?" cried Helen, holding her fast by both hands.

"I would endure in silence," said Violet, firmly.

"What! for a man who does not love you, whom you do not love? When you might free yourself by a divorce!"

"Stop, wicked woman! Do you think for any cause I would make my name, my home, the line I have entered, a cause for public scandal, the talk of all England? When nothing else is left me, I can at least patiently endure."

"When you might free yourself, and marry one you love?"

"Weak and foolish as I may be," said Violet, rather to herself than to Helen, "I should never fall so low as to desecrate marriage in that way. What you suggest is wicked, shameful."

"And you are resolved nothing shall part you from Lord Leigh?"

"Nothing but death."

"How noble and good you are! Forgive me; I was only testing you. You are quite right, you are angelic. Oh, how I wish that such sweetness and faith could save Lord Leigh! They could, if he loved you. But love was not in

his view of marriage. The Lords of Leigh marry for money. All is to be sacrificed to that."

"Oh, why will you come to me and talk so?" sobbed Violet, in a flood of tears. "You drive me wild. Your wicked thoughts haunt me like demons. Leave me; never see me again; for whatever you say or make me think or feel, one thing I am resolved on—I will do my duty till I die. I admit that I am wretched; but I recognize the irrevocable vows I have taken. I bow to my fate."

"I have not intended to hurt or vex you," said Helen. "I really meant to act as a friend. We see these things differently. I truly think that where a pair are miserable together—where the husband is faithless, and the wife, if free, could make a marriage where she would be happy and good—then she had better get free by process of law. You differ. Very good. That ends it. I only wanted to aid you, and some one else, to happiness."

"I think I had better never see you again," said Violet. "I think your views and words dangerous and wicked."

She turned away. Helen Hope stood, with folded arms, to watch her gliding, a slender white shape, through the green aisles of the park. Rebuffed for the present, she did not admit herself conquered, and made herself strong to wait and work—unhappily destined to bring a most awful tragedy on the line of Leigh.

Violet meanwhile had had her thoughts diverted from her sorrow for Kenneth, the renunciation of his presence and friendship. The words of Helen had shown her that she stood in slippery places, and that danger was near. At whatever cost, she must make an effort to save herself and Lord Leigh, and bring about better relations between them.

As she resolved on this, she looked up, and saw her husband sitting on a garden chair, on a shaded side of the terrace, apparently reading, but with a black frown upon his face. The hour was ill chosen for confidence, but in her inexperience she did not see that. She went straight to him, and seating herself by his side, put her soft hand on his arm. Almost any man would have been moved to tenderness by the sad, appealing face, the confiding, sensitive manner, the dainty beauty of this young creature. Lord Leigh, however, was absorbed in a mad memory of the luminous beauty of Edna.

"Lord Keith and his mother left renewed good-by for you, Norman."

"Yes? I bade them good-by at breakfast."

"I shall miss them," began Violet.

"You have company enough, madam, I should say. The house is filled with *your* guests," retorted Leigh.

"I should not want *any* guests, if we could only be happy together, Norman," she said, softly. "If I only knew how to make you happy—if you only would be fond of me——"

"What now!" said Leigh, harshly; "don't you have all your own way? Are you not surrounded with splendor? What new gewgaws will you have? Shall I rebuild the Towers?"

"It is not that, Norman," said Violet, tears trembling on her long lashes. "You know I do not care for splendor. What I want is sympathy, kindness, love. If you only——"

"Nonsense!" said Leigh. "What new whim is this? You don't want splendor? You want love in a cottage, I suppose——"

"I would rather have love in a cottage than a palace without love," said Violet. "We promised to love each other, and we ought to try to do so. We are not trying, I'm afraid. Let us try to have more confidence—more love, that community of interest that we should have."

"I'm not up to the sentimental flights," retorted this man, who within a week had been pleading at Edna Ambrose's feet, that "love deserved response."

Violet fixed her sad, reproachful eyes on the hard, scowling face of Leigh. But she would not be rebuked; she might win him to better things. She said, softly:

"Why should we spend our lives estranged and lonely, when we might be good, and happy, and helpful to each other? I see you are not happy; neither am I. Let us try and do better. Perhaps it is partly my fault; perhaps I did not try hard enough to please you when we were first married, when we were at Paris."

"I remember you did do me the honor to say I married you for your fortune," said Leigh, sarcastically.

"Whatever I said that was wrong, forgive me. It is the misfortune of my life that I have *had* a fortune; it has made me suspicious. Let us forget all unkind words."

But since Leigh had fallen back into such furious love for Edna, he was hard as adamant to poor Violet.

"When we were married," he said, "I thought there were some appearances to keep up. But some women are always bound to find out all that they had better not know. You listened to some gabbler on your marriage day—to old Adam, when he came from Homburg, and to that demon of a girl that you took for embroidery teacher. As far as we two are concerned, the mask has fallen; why put it on again?"

"It is true," said Violet, deeply stung, "that I am wiser than I was when I promised to marry you——"

"So? It is a new comment on the bliss of ignorance."

"And that we are wretched, and likely to remain wretched."

"Like Eve, you have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, and your eyes have been opened more to evil than good. It remains for you to bear the consequences," said Leigh, sharply.

Violet drew herself up, a crimson flush covered her lovely, sorrowful face. She would not humble herself by further pleading with this hard man, and went to her room, cruelly stabbed by her husband, in a fashion of which the law takes no cognizance.

Kate looked at the haggard face and heavy eyes of her little mistress, and shook her head.

"You are the sweetest lady——" began Kate, but a knock at the door silenced her, and Mrs. Ainslie entered.

The good lady was flushed and worried, and so evidently wished for conversation with her niece that Kate discreetly went away to her sewing.

"I think I must take the dear girls away, Violet," said Mrs. Ainslie. "I couldn't think of having Anna get engaged to Captain Gore, before she comes out even. With Keith it would have been different; that would have been a triumph! But Gore is getting too devoted. I consider it cruel of you to let Keith go as you did."

"Aunt," said Violet, earnestly, "put Lord Keith out of your mind. I tell you, assuredly, that Anna has no prospect there at all, and Gore is a fine fellow, with enough to live on."

"Is Keith engaged?" her aunt demanded. "You would know from his mother."

"No, not engaged; but, for some time at least, he will not think of loving any one; he loves, and has lost."

"Some foreign person?" said Mrs. Ainslie, eagerly. "Dead?"

"Dead—to him," added Violet, with a sob under her breath. "I only tell you, aunt, so that you will drop him out of your thoughts for Anna, and not stand in the way of an honest love. I see that Captain Gore likes her, and he is able to support her comfortably."

"Well, Anna shall have her choice in society before she is entangled with Captain Gore, or any untitled man. I shall send her home to Lindenwood to-morrow or Saturday. I think Anna is very attractive. Don't you? Such a color! Such health! Such a laugh! She is as I was when I was young. Well, I shall not pine over Keith, for there is the Marquis of Alwood; he is said to be the handsomest young man in England, and he will be a duke. Who knows? Anna may secure him."

In spite of her sorrow, her disgust, at such bold scheming, Violet could not forbear turning her head away to laugh. Alwood! Destined to become one of the first peers of England! Alwood, in whose veins flowed the most ancient blood in the three kingdoms. Alwood's marriage plotted for in her dressing-room! It seemed simply amusing. Little did Violet think of what her share would be in Alwood's marriage.

"Anna shall go home to-morrow," said Mrs. Ainslie, firmly.

Then Violet could not help laughing aloud.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BESIDE THE BLACK POOL.

The estates of Leigh were princely; they embraced half a county; near the Towers, together with properties acquired in other localities by purchase or marriage. Scenery, woodland, and village, bright and dark, could be found in the wide domains of the Towers.

There was one spot that was generally eschewed, it was so dark, so desolate, so weird, so uncanny, that it would seem only fit for the haunt of a morbid and unbalanced mind. It

was the Black Pool. Beside it stood a singular little building of two stories, each of one room, with a balcony jutting over the water. This building known as "The Earl's Folly," was gloomy and damp as its surroundings. Sometimes for a decade no one entered "The Folly," and it was now falling into decay.

Such a gloomy, ill-omened place, suited the wretched frame of Lord Norman Leigh's spirit.

Having rejected his wife's advances, Leigh shut himself up in his retreat, sitting in the upper room of "The Folly," and moodily gazing at a spider weaving webs in a corner.

One minute Leigh planned a search for Edna; then he lost himself in what might have been; then he considered whether he should go to the Continent, to a long round of those disastrous, deadly green tables. He would have gone at once, only there he was sure to discover nothing of Edna. Then he pondered whether he should take opiates and steep himself in wild unrealities.

In this dangerous loneliness and treacherous self-tempting he had remained over an hour, when he heard the lower door, which he had never found needful to lock, turn heavily on its hinges, and after a little pause a step, the trailing of a gown, a woman's foot upon the stair.

His first thought was that his wife had followed him to press her companionship upon him, and he sprang from his lounging attitude to close the door, which stood ajar, when it swung widely open, and on the threshold stood the fine, stately figure of Helen Hope, and her dark, handsome, fatal face turned to his own.

With a muttered curse, he sank back into his place and stubbornly fixed his gaze on the floor.

For three or four minutes the two remained in this position, Leigh not giving way so much as to move an eyelid. Then Helen crossed the room with a swift step, knelt before him, laid her arms across his knees, and, bending her face to reach the glance of his eyes, said:

"Look at me, Norman! Speak to me! Smile at me! Touch your lips to mine! For the sake of mercy, love me, for I am the one woman in all the world who loves you!"

"Leave me, girl!" said Leigh, angrily. "With men the question is not so much whether they are loved as whether they love. Do you fancy that I love you?"

"You said you did once," wailed Helen.

"I think not; you took too much for granted; your ambition misleading you. Why do you follow me?"

"Because I love you; because you are lonely, and no one else loves you, and out of sheer loneliness and gratitude you will turn to me. Your wife does not love you; and Edna, that moonlight, cold, white creature, never did. Some small girlish fancy was once fed by your looks and words, but it died; she cares nothing for you. She has gone merely to get rid of you. Oh, turn to me!"

"I would rather pursue Edna Ambrose, flying and scorning me, than take the sweetest words of any other woman in the world," said Leigh, madly.

"It will be in vain, all in vain," moaned Helen. "She will never marry you."

"Marry! Heavens! Do you forget I am bound hand and foot?"

"But there may be an end, even to marriage," said Helen, frantically. "Your wife might die, or she—you—you might be divorced. Then you could marry one whose whole hope and thought would be to please you!"

Leigh started as if he had been stung. Then he said, in a frenzy:

"Death! Divorce! Marriage! Fool, do you not see that these words only suggest to me the path open to Edna? She is to me as dew after burning noon, as the soft breeze after the breathless Sahara, as fair flowers after snow, as spring after winter, as peace after despair, as heaven after hell. But you, Helen—you are too much like my own goaded, mad, desperate self."

"If you were free—free, would you not marry me?"

"No, no—by Heaven, no!"

"What would you do?" cried Helen, seizing both his wrists.

"I would die at the feet of Edna Ambrose, unless she told me I might live for her."

"Why scorn me so? Am I not handsome, accomplished, devoted—all that——"

"That befits a Lord of Leigh, ancestry and all?" sneered Leigh.

"Villain! I am your equal. I am good enough for you. I am as good as your mother. Am I more adventuress than she? I know the blood out of which you sprung."

"Good or bad, low or high, it is all one, as far as you are concerned. Your very pursuit sickens me. The more I see you, the more I loathe you."

Helen sprang to her feet with a cry like the scream of some wounded wild creature.

"I will have my revenge," she said. "I will marry you, or die with you! I will bring you to my level somehow, Lord of Leigh, so all the world shall know. Beware a woman's vengeance! It shall fall on you like lightning. From to-day I dedicate myself to such a pursuit that it shall end at your side—at the altar or the grave!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"HERE ARE THE PROOFS OF YOUR DISHONOR."

One by one, as birds migrate from summer homes, the guests of Leigh Towers departed, and Violet was alone, except for Mabel and her governess, whose company she had begged of her Aunt Ainslie.

Grace Fanshaw and Lady Clare Montessor were arranging trousseaux, and the bridegrooms elect, Churchill and Hartington, had gone off with Lord Leigh to a little shooting box he owned in the Highlands, to make havoc through October with the game. Violet was not asked to go.

"The box had no place," said Leigh, "for women's paraphernalia."

Gore went with them, and others were to meet them, alas, as Violet learned casually, two who were terribly given to gaming.

"And there would be chance for a pot of thousands changing hands," said Gore.

Frantic with anxiety, Violet suddenly conceived the idea of appealing to Keith. She wrote him, under cover to Lady Burton, begging him to invite himself to the hunting party, and to watch over Leigh. The response was a telegram, received by Leigh the day before they departed, asking if there was room at the "Box" to give Keith a season among the birds.

"I shall tell him to come," said Leigh to Violet, handing her the dispatch. "You won't be there to drive him off by your rebuffs, and, between us two, I feel surer of myself, and safer, with Keith, than without him."

Violet said not a word. She was noticing the expression on Hartington's face, when he heard of Keith's request. Child as she was, that look was a revelation. She saw that Hartington had intended to lure Leigh on in gaming and drinking. An intense pity for this Leigh, with his strong hereditary passions, his Mephistopheles forever on the watch at his elbow, possessed the soul of Violet. Pity is akin to tenderness. She took Leigh's arm, and said:

"Let us walk out along the Elm avenue."

He yielded to the guiding of her touch, and when they were alone under the grand arches of the elms, she said:

"Norman, you are going away, and I do not want you to go feeling cold or angry with me. I wish to please you. Do not be offended with me about Lord Keith, or any one. I desire only to make you happy. Will you think of and write me when you are gone?"

"I'm a dused bad hand at letter writing," said Leigh, "but I may drop you a line. Yes, I shall certainly think of you, for you are, after all, a real good little creature, Violet, and make a man very little trouble."

This was faint praise, but it was better than nothing.

"Norman," said Violet, "I don't want to make you angry with any one, but—Colonel Hartington is not your friend."

"That is no news, my dear. I always knew that."

"Is he your enemy?"

"Most assuredly he is, and my rival."

"My aunt says—that—he and Clare count already on your succession. They think you look but poorly."

"I hope to outlive them both!" cried Leigh; "but, then, Violet, if you only had a son, their schemes would be knocked to pieces whether I lived or died. I say, Violet, you don't know how much I should care for you if you checkmated Hartington by a robust little Lord of Leigh."

"Norman, Heaven may send us a blessing like that if He finds us worthy of it; but for the present let me tell you what I fear. I fear Colonel Hartington thinks that you can be tempted with cards and brandy, and he means to do it, and so help on your poor health, excite your nerves, spoil your sleep, wear you out. Now will you be on your guard against him? I saw a great deal in his face when he heard that telegram. He is sorry Keith will be there. He thinks Keith will advise you for your good."

"And, by Jove, I'll take Keith's advice against the colonel's any day, and outwit my good heir presumptive. He is older than I am by ten years. What is he counting on my death for, confound him."

"I shall feel much better, if I know you are to be safe, and look out for your health, and get the benefit of that bracing mountain air," said Violet.

"Well, well, I'll do my best; and I'll meet you at your aunt's, for the holidays, at Lindenwood, or I'll be here by the first of December, and take you to Lindenwood."

Thus Leigh and his friends set off for the shooting box in the North, and Violet was left to herself in the great desolate, ancient mansion.

What was her joy on the third day of her absolute reign, while she was trying by embroidery to while away the time, until Mabel and her governess were done with morning lessons, to receive a letter from Lady Burton, saying that as she was alone, and her son had gone North, she would like to come to the Towers for a visit.

Violet answered by a telegram, and could hardly wait the three days more until she might drive to the station to meet her best friend.

A time of peace then came to the Countess of Leigh. Lady Burton scarcely ever mentioned Kenneth, or any thing that concerned him, except as she read aloud his very general and graphic letters, about their life at the "Box." There was much about Leigh in them, always anything that could be to Leigh's advantage. The breezy, healthful, simple life was described, and without those letters Violet would scarcely have known how her husband fared, for Leigh sent only a brief note at intervals of a fortnight or so.

The woods were thinned by the November winds when Lord Leigh came back to the Towers. Violet was alone when he came, and constant to her sweet endeavor to do her duty, and establish right feelings between them, she welcomed him with a warmth that even surprised herself.

But after the pleasures of the chase and a lodge full of young men, with their active life and enjoyments, home palled speedily upon Leigh. There was nowhere in particular for him to go before the wedding of Clare and Miss Fanshaw, and soon Leigh had fallen back into his habit of retreating to that deadly haunt over the Black Pool.

One day, after hours of pacing up and down the upper room, he flung himself upon a low lounge covered with leopard skins, and slept. He woke, roused by a light touch on his brow. The touch mingled with his dreams.

"Edna," he said, "Edna, have I found you?"

Then his eyes opened, and he lay looking wonderingly into the face bent over his.

"No, no, you have not found Edna—you will never find her—she has another lover; but I have none but you. It is I—Helen. Say you are glad to see me, Norman!"

"Here again! You haunt me, like the ghost of a crime!"

"And am I not such to you? Was it not a crime to arouse all the love of a passionate, repressed heart that had never loved before; and when I adored you, to fling all my devotion back in my face with cruel mockery?"

"Love goes where it is sent," said Leigh, pushing her from him and rising up. You seem capable of doing anything to secure me; and you should understand how I would have done anything to secure Edna. For her I sought you, as my only avenue to her. You were blind indeed not to see from the first that I had no serious intentions toward you."

"Why should I see that? Am I not accomplished beyond most women, and does not my glass tell me I am handsomer than most?"

"No doubt; but remember your birth. Who and what are you to mate with a Leigh?"

"Have a care, Norman. You fling my birth in my face; has it not stung me with scorpions since ever I knew how and why I differed from other people? Do you not know that in women, such as I am, love has a twin sister called *hate*, and devotion has another side—even revenge. Who and what are you, to boast over me? What blood was your mother, pray tell me?"

"Honest, at least, and her father an English officer, her mother of a family of rank. Silence, girl—am I to justify my lineage to you, a foundling?"

Helen sprang to her feet, white with fury, and a scream of rage, a mad, inarticulate cry passed her lips.

"I will bring your accursed pride to the ground!" she said, stamping with frenzy. "I will drag you down! I have been searching out the history of your family. Your mother was married before she married Lord Leigh!"

"She was not!"

"She was! I have seen the record—married to an attorney in Ireland. How do you know that I cannot prove that she married your father while her first husband lived, or that you were the attorney's child? Do you not know how your cousin stands ready to seize your inheritance, and Lady Clare, who will soon be his wife, hates you, whom once she hoped to marry? And if I go to them with these suggestions, and tell what I know, will they not fill England with their clamor? If they do not unseat you, they will drag you and your family story forth, a target for the arrows of every tongue. I will go to them. As I cannot have love, I will have revenge. I will urge them to investigate your claim. I will dethrone you from this seat of Leigh, wherein you boast over me."

"You? Impossible! Who would listen to such frivolous suggestions, or heed your mad tale, or count you other than a crazed adventuress? Who would help you?"

"*I would help her!*" came a voice from the door-way.

Lord Leigh and Helen turned simultaneously; a man of middle age—a short, spare, sinewy frame, bronzed face, keen eyes, shaggy hair, and rough beard—stood looking eagerly, triumphantly at them both. There was a malign sparkle in his eye when it fell upon Leigh, and a strange leaping flame over his whole face, when he turned toward Helen.

But the effect of his gaze on Helen was singular; she shuddered from head to foot, gave a low cry and averting her face, as if she could not look on him, she rushed past him and fled from "The Earl's Folly."

One instant the stranger spread his hands, as if to detain her. Then he stayed himself and turned to Leigh.

"Yes, I will help her. By Jove, a handsome woman shall not want a coadjutor, while Bart Kemp is above ground."

"And what has Bart Kemp to do with my affairs, or in my presence, uninvited? Out of here, and if you wish to see that mad girl, seek her!"

"Business first," said the stranger, coolly. "I introduce myself as your mother's step-son, by her first marriage with Bart Kemp, my father. A sort of brother I am, you see, Lord Leigh, and evidently not welcome."

"You are a vile impostor."

"Not a bit of it. I have papers to prove all I say. So you didn't know she had been Mrs. Kemp? Odd that the handsome woman and I are on the same track. We'll hunt you together, unless you buy us off."

"Buy you off!" thundered Leigh. "From and for what?"

"It's worth some thousands to remain Lord of Leigh, isn't it?"

"That is my birthright."

"So? Possibly not. Suppose I prove that you are not of Leigh blood at all; or suppose, being Leigh, you are not a lawful Leigh?"

"Never! I defy you!"

"Ah, let me read you an item or two."

The light in the room was waning; but the red sunset from behind the trees that hung darkling across the pool shot upward through the open windows, and dyed the ceiling red. The man, a fantastic being, in his suit of dark, large plaid, with much chain, several rings, and a conspicuous pin, skipped across the room, and upon the seat of the window, to bring himself into the strongest light, the sunset glowing over and behind him in ominous blood-red, he drew from his breast-pocket two papers, and crying, "Here are the proofs of your dishonor!" waved them over his head.

Leigh darted forward to wrest them from him. He felt sure he had not reached the window, nor touched his enemy, when, like a flash, the man sank out of sight. There was no outcry, but the heavy fall of a body into the Black Pool.

Leigh leaned far from the window, and saw only the wide turbid circles on the closing waters. His first impulse was to rescue the man. He dashed down the stairs, pulling off his coat as he went. But Helen, in her wild flight, had flung to the heavy ancient door, and the handle had so fixed itself that Leigh's utmost power could not open it. He could not wrench open a casement, and, after some ten minutes of fruitless effort to release himself, he dashed back to the upper room, leaped from the rear window into an adjacent tree, and so reaching the ground, hurried to search for sign of the fallen man.

He found nothing. As he came, so he had gone—in absolute mystery. The quieted waters told no tales, but over

Norman Leigh's spirit a terrible horror fell. Had he touched the man or not? Had he flung him to his death? Did he bear the brand of Cain?

Lord Leigh felt like one in a continuous, terrible nightmare. The vision of that man sinking backward into empty space, uttering no cry, making no effort to stay his fall, and then the black, still waters sending widening circles to the dark shore, and not even one bubble of breath coming up to tell of the life that had been, filled Norman Leigh with a sickening horror.

What had been his part in this tragedy? He had felt full of fury, and sprang forward intent on seizing and rending away whatever papers the man held. Had he, in his fury, flung him from his precarious place? Had he been guilty of his death?

His distress increased almost to a mania. He saw no more of Helen, could not learn that any one had seen the stranger, nor heard of him. He searched and sought all about the Pool, but found no sign of him who was possibly his victim.

He sought to calm the tumult of his spirit by interesting himself in other things. He took refuge in the society of his wife; her innocence and gentleness soothed his perturbed spirit. He now took her with him when he drove about the estate, and her presence seemed to exorcise the fiends that haunted his soul. Together they made a trip to London to order wedding-presents for Clare and Grace, and when the gifts came home, and Leigh looked on Clare's diamonds glittering in their velvet bed, he suddenly said, bitterly:

"I know what piece of news I'd like best to take the colonel for his wedding present. Zounds! he would look black, but I am sick of having my senior boast himself as my heir."

Violet flushed, but made no reply. In these days Leigh spoke to her often of his longing for an heir, and Violet saw that her childless state was likely to widen and make permanent the breach between them.

The middle of December saw the Earl and Countess of Leigh among the chief witnesses of the "marriage of Clare, eldest daughter of Andrew, tenth Earl of Montessor, to Colonel James Peter Lester Leigh Hartington, heir presumptive of the Earldom of Leigh," and so on.

“Confound the man!” said Leigh to Violet, between his teeth. “If I could ask him to the christening of twin boys at this date a year hence, I’d be the happiest man in the world—anything to stop his easy assumptions about inheriting Leigh.”

From Clare’s wedding they went to Lindenwood for the Christmas festivities. Early January saw Violet and her husband at Lady Fanshaw’s pretty home in Sussex for the wedding of the charming Grace; and when Grace and her husband, Sir Tom, had been a week at Churchill Abbey, in Kent, the Leighs and others went there for a three weeks’ visit, and the splendid old abbey was in highest gala all that time.

The time drew near for going to London for the gay season. Unusually brilliant social events were anticipated, and the young Countess of Leigh looked forward with a natural interest to her independent entrance into the gay world, with her own house and her own entertainments.

All Belgravia, with its stately palaces, had nothing more magnificent than the home into which Violet was ushered between rows of liveried servants.

Before the house lay the Green Park, with its soft, verdant turf, its stately trees, its surroundings of palaces. St. James’ and the Queen’s palaces, and Stafford and Spencer Houses were close at hand. Violet was in the inmost shrine of the English nobility, and her husband remarked to her, as he showed her plate and glass used by monarchs from the Tudor times:

“Your cousin, Montessor, boasts of being tenth earl of his house; but I am fifteenth Earl of Leigh.” And when he showed her in the library a heavy gold shield, with the arms of Leigh in rich relief, he said, proudly: “Sixteen quarterings, and never a bar sinister. It is a line worth continuing.”

But shortly the relief afforded Lord Leigh by these new scenes and excitements faded away, and the old questioning of himself as to where the man was who had come to threaten him, and what hand he had had in his disappearance, returned to him.

Meanwhile the wild-rose tint paled on Violet’s cheek; her brown eyes shone, not with laughter, but with tears; her splendors mocked her, and were the livery of her bondage.

Leaning back, one day, in her landau, all alone, her

hands listlessly fallen in her lap, a far-away look in her eyes, her face pathetic in its loneliness and longing, and striving to be calm, and yet every line telling her woe and her despair, Violet was unconsciously, for fully five minutes, under the steadfast gaze of Edna Ambrose.

The pathos of that mournful girl-face roused Edna to a sudden and singular resolve.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VIOLET'S GOOD ANGEL.

Lady Burton was at her London house. She was alone, but she expected her son soon, who was to take again his long-empty seat in the House of Peers.

She was sitting in her boudoir, lamenting to herself Violet's evidently growing misery and Leigh's singularly increased harshness and neglect, when a footman brought her a card:

“EDNA AMBROSE HAVILAND.”

Lady Burton went down to the drawing-room.

Edna was standing almost in the center of the drawing-room, under the chandelier. Lady Burton advanced, holding out both her hands.

“My dear girl, how pleased I am to see you! How kind of you to come to me.”

“I almost feared it would be an intrusion,” said Edna; “but I had an errand that I felt I must do; and that one hour we talked in the wood, you looked so kind, so wise, so good, I felt sure I could trust you.”

“You may indeed trust me. To be faithful and helpful are my strongest characteristics,” said Lady Burton, leading her to a seat. “I think we shall not be disturbed for a long while. Now, my dear, what is it?”

“It is about the Countess of Leigh,” she said; “I feel so anxious about her. From what you said the day I saw you, and from what I heard from old Adam, Lord Leigh's confidential servant, I believe you her best and oldest friend, and I want you to help me to help her. I saw her yesterday in her carriage; it was a sight to break one's heart; she is so young, so frail, and she looked so lonely and wretched,

as if she were dying with heart-break. Oh, Lady Burton, I want to try and make things better for her—for them; for I am, and always must be, Lord Leigh's friend—his sister-friend—and wish him to be good and happy. It is a long story to tell, but I am quite willing to tell you all. I know Leigh is not a good man; but—oh, Lady Burton, cannot he be made a good man, and good to his wife? You do not know how I wish his welfare. I thought I loved him once.”

“My dear girl,” said Lady Burton, “I am quite alone to-day; let us go to my boudoir, and I will refuse myself to all callers. You will stay with me, and you will tell me all that you have in your heart. Be sure of my sympathy and help.”

They went up to the boudoir, and when the hat and coat were laid aside, and Lady Burton noted the round, satiny throat, and perfect face rising, flower-like, from the soft ruffles about her neck, her heart went out to this girl, and she wondered if she might not have her for a daughter.

Then the harmonious contralto voice began to set this young woman's views and experiences to music. Edna told of her motherless life with her father in Cornwall, with occasional glimpses of wealth at the home of her childless maternal uncle, Mr. Haviland. Of the good, mother-like governess, who had brought her up, and then died, and been succeeded by Miss Hope. She told how, in a brief visit to her father's half-sister, at Rose Lodge, Lord Leigh had seen her, and become infatuated and made a long pursuit of her.

“And now I feel as if *I* am a cause of sorrow to that sweet young creature, his wife. When I saw her in her carriage, sad and heart-sick, I felt as if I must devote all my time, my life, to comforting her, and making this unhappy marriage turn out a happy one. Can I, do you think? Is there no way in which I can help her? You love her; you know her best. Help me to plan. She has heard of me, and thought me an enemy as Miss Ambrose; but as Miss Haviland she does not know me at all; and as Miss Haviland cannot I become her friend; and as a friend, if I could only bring before her all that is good in him, and make him see that he can never, never be to me anything but a friend, and that only if he is a good husband to her; and if I could make him see her as good, and sweet, and charm-

ing as she is, as I see her! Oh, it all sounds so wild, feeble, and foolish to speak it; but in my heart in some way it seems right and good."

"No girl needs a friend of her own age more than Violet," said Lady Burton; "and if you met, she must love you; no one could help it."

"And how shall we meet?"

"If you are the niece of John Haviland, of Brompton, I met him and your mother when I was a young girl; and your father, the Cornwall vicar, was well known to me by reputation. I can plan you a much better way to know Violet. Come here as my guest; spend the season with me. I shall love to introduce you wherever I go."

"Oh, Lady Burton, I cannot do that."

But Lady Burton was persistent, and next day ordered rooms made ready for her "young friend, Miss Haviland."

"If I agree to your proposal, dear Lady Burton," said Edna, "do you not see that I shall meet Lord Leigh in society, as well as his wife?"

"And why not?" said Lady Burton. "Must a girl of your accomplishments, beauty, youth, family, hide herself like a criminal, be left deprived of all social life, or find companionship only among uncongenial people, because a man who courted and then forsook her, and married, has chosen again to fall in love with her? If Lord Leigh becomes importunate it will be easy to repress him. You will be under my protection."

And so, after some discussion, it was settled.

"When will you come to me?" "Let us say Thursday," said Lady Burton.

Edna appeared at Lady Burton's with a neat little maid, skilled and devoted, and a wardrobe of dainty, exquisite taste, simple and rich. She did not need the varied and elaborate toilets required by many young beauties. Her own loveliness was her charm, and simplicity became her as it does the lilies. Natural flowers were her favorite ornaments. She had a store of rich, old, almost priceless lace from her aunt Haviland and mother.

Lady Burton took care to bring about an immediate meeting with Violet. She drove to see the little Countess of Leigh on the day after Edna's arrival, and bring her back to lunch with her.

"I have a young friend, Miss Haviland, to pass the sea-

son with me, and I want you to be friends at once. I have cards for your aunt's ball next week for her, and your great ball to introduce your two cousins will come off next, I suppose. I shall follow with something—not a crush, but, I hope, very charming, and with *musicale*, for Miss Haviland's voice is exquisite.”

When Violet descended from Lady Burton's barouche at the door she glanced up, and saw a charming face between the flowers in the drawing-room window. Edna, with a naive anxiety, had been looking out for them for an hour.

Edna herself took off the pretty hat and the little gloves, and before Violet knew it, she was chatting away with the stranger, as one long known. They went to the conservatory and discovered what flowers, even what colors, each loved best; to the music-room, and confided each to each what songs were dearest; they told what novels and poems of the season they had read, and what characters in each they liked best; and Edna had told Violet that of all things she liked painting; and Lady Burton had said she might have the dearest little studio, and might she paint Violet, “for I don't mean to be very, very gay, you know,” said Edna. “I mean to have some time to myself.”

“But you'll come to *my* entertainments, won't you?” said Violet. “And, when I get lonesome and sick of everything, may I come to your studio?”

“Let us see each other every day,” said Edna.

“Do you think you'd mind very much being very great friends with me?” said Violet. “Real, deep friends? I shall be a trouble, I fear, for I'm terribly low-spirited sometimes.”

“We'll do away with all that, and be the very dearest friends ever were known if you like,” said Edna, warmly.

CHAPTER XXXV.

“A MERE ACQUAINTANCE! CAN I BE NO MORE?”

It was the evening of the Countess Montessor's ball. No more splendid social event had been known in London for years. Lady Clare Hartington looked imperial in her stately dress of white velvet and pearls. Lady Grace Churchill, the other bride, was radiant in a robe of white lace trimmed

with Persian lilacs; but Lord Leigh felt a little glow of pride stir his heart, as his young countess, in a rose-colored brocade, shimmering with multitudinous diamonds in countless points of light, caused a buzz of admiration even through that self-contained, aristocratic assembly, as she moved up, and took her place beside her aunt. The Marquis of Alwood, prospective Duke of Ripon, pressed forward at once to be presented to her, and asked her hand for the first dance. Sunned in universal applause and admiration, Violet stood with a bright face, smiles wreathing her lips, dimpling her cheeks, gleaming in her uplifted brown eyes; her voice rippled merrily in piquant, artless sayings; without vanity or coquetry she stood the center of all eyes.

Suddenly the Marquis of Alwood gave a start.

"Lady Leigh! Tell me—who is that divine creature!"

Violet looked up. Edna Haviland, in a simple robe of cream white satin, with no ornaments but lilies of the valley, was entering the room with Lady Burton and Lord Kenneth Keith.

There was almost a hush of admiration and wonder. Violet whispered:

"It is my dear friend, Miss Edna Haviland;" and yet her heart grew sick and faint.

The words reached not only the marquis, but Lord Leigh. He turned, and his eyes fell on the woman whom he worshiped.

After saluting the Countess Montessor, Lady Burton and her two companion's turned to Violet's party. It was Violet herself who presented the Marquis Alwood and Lord Leigh to Miss Haviland. The honest soul of Edna was displeased at the idea of seeming to be a stranger to one whom she knew so well. She said, quietly, as she gave Norman Leigh her hand for a second:

"Lord Leigh and I have met before; I trust we are fairly good friends."

Norman Leigh nearly lost his breath in wonder at Edna's beauty, and her unexpected appearance. At first he was so dazzled by his good fortune at meeting her, and by admiration, that he forgot everything but to gaze at her. He came to his senses in realizing that the Marquis of Alwood, Lord Keith, and Sir Tom had seized the opportunity of securing her hand for several dances. He pressed hastily to her side.

"You will make me happy by one waltz, Miss Haviland?"

"Really, Lord Leigh," said Edna, glancing along her tablet, with indifference, "I have not a waltz left."

"All the waltzes of the evening gone!" said Leigh, amazed.

"All in which I shall indulge," said Edna, calmly.

"Some dance then," pleaded Leigh, eagerly; "do not deny me all."

"I think I have promised all that I shall dance," said Edna, again referring to her tablets, and then glided into conversation with Sir Tom and Lady Grace Churchill.

Lord Leigh had engaged his wife for the first dance; he had only expected to dance that once, as he was not fond of that amusement. When he led out Violet, Edna and Lord Keith were near them. He grew pale with rage and jealous envy, as he saw Edna's delicate hand resting on Keith's shoulder.

Whispered praises of his lovely little wife fell coldly on Leigh's ear—were hardly understood; but every word that suggested that Edna and Kenneth looked rarely well together, and made a magnificent couple, pierced Leigh's fevered heart like a savage knife-thrust.

"What am I to understand by your appearance here with Lady Burton?" whispered Leigh, later, in Edna's ear.

"Why, that she is my chaperon, and that I am likely to have a delightful season," said Edna, serenely.

"Am I to consider that it means a match with Keith?"

"Really, my lord," said Edna, scornfully, "I cannot see on what ground you presume to ask such a question. I may be ignorant of the customs of society. Do *mere acquaintances* challenge personal acts and intentions in this fashion?"

"*A mere acquaintance!* Oh, Edna, can I be no more!"

"Not a whit more," said Edna, "unless by dignity, good judgment, and nobleness, you show yourself worthy to be *my friend*."

Lord Leigh retired to a secluded corner of the conservatory to meditate. He looked from the fragrant, flowery shades of the conservatory into the brilliant ball-room, and saw the rosy, diamond sprinkled figure of Violet taking her place in the dance on the arm of Sir Tom Churchill. How frail a thing she looked, yet standing as an invincible wall

between him and his desire! Her child-like, touching pensive beauty made no impression upon him, because near it shone, in a serene splendor, the matchless face of Edna.

When Lord Leigh came out of the conservatory, the palms and the ferns, the roses and orchids, had heard his vow, to bend all his powers in reinstating himself in the heart of Edna Ambrose Haviland. This resolve calmed him a little, and then he had time to wonder how his wife had become acquainted with Edna, whose friendship she had lately indignantly rejected. She had called her "her friend!" What mystery was this? He saw the slender figure of Violet resting in a large gray plush easy-chair, which set her delicate pink brocade and her dark shining head in bright relief. He went to her, bent dutifully over her chair, and taking her fan, began gently fanning her. Violet looked up gratefully.

"Are you enjoying yourself, Lady Leigh?"

"Oh, much, thank you."

"That is a very pretty friend of yours, in care of Lady Burton. Where did you find her?"

"At Lady Burton's. Lady Burton has a genius for surrounding herself with lovely girls. Is she not exquisite?"

"Very, indeed."

"And we are such friends! Do you not think it would be delightful if she would come and stay with us some?"

"Perhaps, for a little, toward the close of the season, if you like," said Leigh, quietly, while his heart leaped madly.

"At least she will be at all our entertainments—at our ball next week. Oh, do you know she has a studio at Lady Burton's, and paints. She is to paint me. I will get her to let me bring you there some time, if you like, Norman."

"Thank you, my dear. If you are rested would you like to go see some wonderful cacti in the conservatory?"

The presence of Edna, for whom his absorbing passion daily grew, turned Norman Leigh's mind from the dreadful scene by the Black Pool. His spirit shook off some of that clinging, deadly burden of self-accusation, and terror of some discovery that might bring crime to his charge. To see more of Edna, he followed more closely his wife, who was now constantly with her best loved friend.

The night of Violet's ball was a marked occasion. No expense had been spared to make it a scene of unmatched splendor. Lord Leigh had opened the ball with Violet, and had secured Edna for the second dance. She had been unable to refuse him a waltz, but just as they were taking their place on the floor, Edna's hand on his shoulder, his arm clasped about her lovely waist, some one touched his hand, and gave him a telegram. It was from his steward at the Towers.

"Wilcox has disappeared. They mean to drag the Black Pool for him to-morrow."

The room whirled about him. The floor seemed to open at his feet. He saw, as in a vision, a horrible disfigured, ghastly face lying on the bottom of the Black Pool, and what damnatory evidence might not be in the papers clutched in the dead hand—possibly decipherable still?

"Lord Leigh, you are ill. You have news, let me release you," said Edna.

"I must go to the Towers," he gasped.

Without a word, steadying him as she seemed to lean on his arm, she led him from the ball-room to the library and rang the bell for Adam. Then she gave him a glass of wine.

"Adam, get my cloak, and follow me—we must go to the Towers," said Leigh, when his old valet entered.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"MEET ME, OR I WILL RUIN YOU!"

Lord Leigh could hardly have told why he had summoned Adam to go with him on that terrible night journey. He scarcely could have told why he went at all. It was gray morning when they arrived at the Towers, and roused the slumbering household.

"There was no need to have you come, my lord," said the steward. "It was only a matter of dragging the Pool, and I thought you should know. You are particular as to such things. Wilcox disappeared, and his mother will have it he's drowned in the Pool."

"I will go and superintend it," said Lord Leigh, coldly.

"I have always, from a boy, had a strange fancy for knowing what is in the bottom of the Pool."

The dew was still drenching the tender young leaves and the great pale, fragrant bloom of the primroses, when the party from the Towers went to see the dragging of the Black Pool. There was one little level space of turf near the water, beside "The Earl's Folly," and the coroner's man said:

"We'll lay the body here when we get it."

There Norman Leigh planted himself where the body would be laid at his feet. But whose body, and what a sight it would be for him?

Back and forth over the Pool rowed the boats, dragging this way and that, until the sun was high.

"There's naught here, sir," shouted the men.

"There must be some deep, unsoundable hole that the drags do not reach," said Lord Leigh to the coroner's man.

"I don't see why we should think a body is there at all," said the man. "It's only widow Wilcox's whim, sir."

"No body in there?" said Lord Leigh, slowly. "None?"

"Quite sure there's none, my lord."

"Did you think there was a body in there, master?" cried old Adam, pressing forward.

"I think? No, certainly not," said Leigh, and fell forward senseless.

They carried him into "The Earl's Folly," and laid him on the couch. Then, as Adam loosened his lord's clothing, he found a revolver, all barrels loaded, ready to his hand. The old man looked at it a little, then hurled it through the window far out into the Pool.

It was later in the day when Leigh asked for "What had been in his breast."

"It is under the water, master. What did you carry it for? To do the last, wickedest thing a man may?"

"No doubt it is what it will come to. But never mind that now, Adam. I feel better. But let us get to London. It was all nonsense to come up here."

A load was off Leigh's heart. The Pool had no tales to tell, no dead man, no dangerous papers. The man had disappeared as strangely as he came. If Helen Hope would also disappear, Lord Leigh would be at peace. But the very day he returned to London, Violet, calling at the house

of her aunt Ainslie, met the younger girls going out with a new governess—a treasure, Mrs. Ainslie said.

The governess was—Helen Hope!

The three younger Ainslies about this time took a wonderful fancy for their cousin Violet, and for making calls on her early, before the day of fashionable life had begun. They supposed this a spontaneous notion on their part, but, in reality, it was craftily opened and kept up by the governess.

The first morning they found Violet breakfasting in bed. Leigh had been at the House of Peers late, and slept at his club. Violet had been at a great crush at the Countess of Norfolk's, and felt singularly wearied and depressed. When she heard that her three little cousins had called, she had them come up.

"I fear we intrude," said Helen, quietly; "but they *would* come; and their lives are so very quiet and dull."

"I'm so glad you brought them," said Violet, turning her soft, tender eyes to Helen. "Sit down, and let them talk. They are so artless, and I think they love me."

"Love you! Why, Violet, we love you to death!" and the three juveniles precipitated themselves on their cousin, and kissed her hands and hair and her little soft neck. Helen Hope slid into the chair close to Violet's pillow, and some way, in a few minutes, had taken the tender, confidential tone of old friendship. Aided by the smiles and prattling voices of the juniors, the breakfast went better. The broiled pigeon and wafer bread and tea were finished, and the children examined all the little golden spoons, and the gold-lined jugs, and their accommodating governess did not see when Kate filled their pockets with bon-bons. They must be anxious to come again; and, as Helen Hope coolly told herself, looking at their robust growth, "it would take a deal of anything to hurt them."

Again and again they came, and, soon as the children went to the conservatory with Kate for flowers, or to the housekeeper's room for unusual treats of preserves, Violet and Helen fell into conversation, and Helen discovered that Violet had a rooted antipathy to a certain Miss Ambrose, and had no idea at all that Edna Haviland had anything in common with that object of her irritation—also, she found that Violet was very unhappy, and believed herself failing in health, and wanted to die, and would not send for a phy-

sician, nor let any one know her wretched feelings. Violet avoided her husband's name, and would make no complaints; but in Helen's skillful hands, Violet was plastic as wax, and it did not need direct or conscious revelations to make Helen aware of all that wretched domestic history—the coldness, the disappointment, the heart-ache.

“All I want,” said Violet, “is to be out of the world. I am so *lonesome*—so low-spirited. I mean to keep up as long as I can, so no one shall know how miserable I am, and I shall wear out by degrees, and when I go back to Leigh Towers, I will just fade away in a decline, as my mother did finally. I shall not hold out so long. Probably I am not so strong as she was. I wish I could be buried by her, under the roses at Ainslie church-yard; but I must be buried in those fearful cold vaults at Leigh Towers. Still, it doesn't much matter.”

Thus Violet spoke, when, in the secrecy of her own room, she was beguiled into confidential talk by the wily Helen. Perhaps this expression of her troubles relieved her, for she was of a confiding nature. When she went out, the air, excitement, her very fragility, bringing fitful flushes to her cheek, and brightness to her eyes, made her look well to the careless observer. Lady Barton and Edna saw deeper, but they did not know all—not all that was poured out to Helen—for the secret about Kenneth gave Violet a certain reticence concerning her married life, to Lady Burton, and, as far as she knew, Edna was at most a stranger to Leigh, and she could not complain. So far as she could, Violet was striving to do her duty to the bitter end.

Mrs. Ainslie, sparing no effort to make the first season of her dear girls a success, gave, among other entertainments, a fancy ball. Helen Hope was as Mrs. Ainslie's right hand in arranging costumes and decorations, though, of course, it never entered the good lady's head that her governess might long to have other part in it than thus serving. Having served, indeed, until all was done, and the young ladies dressed, Helen declared herself dying with headache, and, retreating to her own room, locked herself in. She knew all the dresses that were to be assumed by the guests belonging to the family, and that Lord Leigh was taking the congenial character of Francis the First, of France, while Kenneth Keith was to be Bayard, the spotless chevalier, Edna, the Lily Maid of Astolat, and Violet, Juliet.

When nearly all the guests were gathered, how could hostess or guests know that a tall, elegant figure, dressed for Reade's "Yellow Masque," had not come in at the guests' entrance, but had stolen down from the upper regions of the house—was, in fact, the governess, Helen Hope?

Norman Leigh knew her well enough, as her voice fell on his ear.

"Norman, I must, I will see you alone!"

"In Heaven's name! how came you here?"

"Never mind. I shall be, on Friday night, at Lady Norfolk's 'Fern Fantasie,' and I will see you in the conservatory. Wear this on your shoulder, and meet me, or I will ruin you!"

She handed him a tiny box, and went away.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"THE FERN FANTASIE."

The Countess of Norfolk was a woman of great genius, kind heart, and lofty reputation. She was also given to the most extravagant whims—had always some new mania of the hour—and was royally lavish in expenditure. For three years ferns had been the great passion of the Countess of Norfolk. Her fernery had become celebrated in all England—we may say in the world—for she received new ferns from the four quarters of the globe, and botanists came from many lands to study her treasures.

The countess never gave but two great entertainments in a season, but each of these was expected to be a theme of wonder and helpless envy and admiration. She had discovered an entirely new variety of *fete* for this season, and called it a "fern fantasie."

To this entertainment Anna Ainslie had received a card, through the intercession of Violet, who was a great favorite with the countess. But Anna had also received an invitation to a party given by Captain Gore's sister, with whom she had formed a close acquaintance. This she had confided to Helen, and Helen had arranged that she herself should claim Mrs. Watson's invitation, and that, leaving the house together, she and Anna should privately change costumes,

and Helen should personate Anna at the "fern fantasie," leaving Anna free to go to Mrs. Watson's. As Anna had a marvelous gift for conversing in monosyllables, the exchange might be fairly easy.

It was thus that in a green domino, with mossy-brown trimmings, Helen Hope arrived at the Countess Norfolk's under the chaperonage of Violet, who, on entering the carriage, had innocently remarked:

"Why, Anna! how tall and slender that plain domino makes you look, and what an immense time you kept the carriage!"

"Yes," said softly the supposititious Anna.

Norman Leigh was also in the carriage, sulking in one corner. His presence thrilled and fired the mad heart of the infatuated Helen Hope. For him life was a spasm of fury, as wherever he went he expected to see Edna attended by devoted cavaliers, from whom he, the husband of Violet, must be excluded.

Merry and charming masques filled the splendid reception-rooms of the Countess of Norfolk. Night, Titania, Sleep, Dreams, all the fern varieties, Endymion, Diana, Oberon, Puck, Orion; but, stateliest and loveliest of all, was Edna Haviland as Luna. She was in a robe and vail of diaphanous tissue, with silver threads; it was looped with stars, and sown with tiny crystal drops like dew. To look at her was to remember the song of the romance lay, "Her eyes are softer than sleep." On each shoulder her delicate, misty vail was caught by a pearl and silver lunar moth.

Violet Leigh was Titania, and a sweet fairy queen she was. Lord Leigh was in a plain domino of green velvet, with silver dots, representing a South American fern—on his shoulder was the lunar moth, which he had found in the box he had received from Helen Hope.

There were many dominoes of silver and brown, such as Anna Ainslie had chosen.

Early in the evening Leigh attached himself to the train that followed Edna, for, as she wore no mask, all knew her, and a crowd pressed about her.

"We are matched by fate to-night, fair Luna," said Leigh, "the same emblem rests on the shoulders of us both."

"That is curious," said Edna. "I thought no one else

had such ornaments. My uncle had these made for me when he was in Genoa, and I gave one away."

"Let us wander into the conservatory and hear the new music, prepared for the evening, 'the Song of the Nightingale.' I believe that is Tom Tower as the Arctic Owl, and little Ensign Blunt as the Screech Owl, and well suited."

"And you are Lord Leigh, by your voice," said Edna, as they stood on the threshold of the conservatory.

"Thank you for remembering anything about me," said Leigh.

"I do not wish to remember anything unkind about you, I am sure. I left Rose Lodge very angry at you, but now that I have met your wife, and love her with all my heart, I cannot be your enemy."

"Will you be my friend?" asked Leigh, eagerly.

"I tell you honestly," Norman," said Edna, "I will be your friend, just as you show yourself worthy of friendship, by making your wife happy. Was there ever a sweeter-looking creature than she is now, as the queen of fairy-land?"

"Well enough; but you know you are the bright particular star of the whole evening."

"You know that it was always one of my peculiarities to dislike compliments, and the longer I am in society the more I weary of them. You have been kind and polite, and as I wish you to be, since I entered your social circle, Lord Leigh, and I am willing to let by-gones perish, and be friends, if your lovely little wife is the center and bond of our friendship."

"Tell me," burst out Leigh, "do you mean to marry?"

"The question is not a fair one; but in time, no doubt, I shall marry."

The Marquis of Alwood came up, and reminded the lovely Luna that she was to dance with him. Many of the merry guests were now in the ball-room, Strauss' waltzes took the place of the soft nocturnes, and Lord Leigh, with wrath in his heart, strolled farther into the conservatory.

There, in the green depths of almost tropic richness, his reverie was interrupted by a domino of green silk with moss-brown fringes.

"Norman, you have come to me! Are you learning at last that one heart of all the world is true and faithful,

one woman would die for you—finds heaven only in your presence?”

“I came—I am curious, Helen, to know your open-sesame to such select circles as this and the rout at Mrs. Ainslie’s. Have you, too, inherited a fortune, and become a lady of fashion?”

“As Edna has? If I had, remember, yours would be the eye in these gay scenes that my look would seek, yours would be the one voice I should hear. I should not pass you as she does, with that cold, calm smile, and mock you with my lovers. I cannot tell you how I came here. I came to tell you that I am always true, and in loneliness you can turn to me.”

“But why consider me lonely?”

“I know things that you do not. Edna is preparing to marry. In a few months she will have secured a title, as she has always schemed to do. And in that few months you will be a widower.”

Leigh started.

What are you saying, girl?”

“Blind creature! do you not see that your wife is fading before your eyes? The new year’s snows will not find her here. Then, Norman, you will be free! Then you will turn to me? Remember my faith, my adoration; that I of all women love you most—would live to please your slightest whim. Tell me when you are free, will you marry me?”

“No, I will not,” said Leigh, shaking off her hand from his arm and muttering an oath. “I don’t believe what you say. My wife is well enough, well as ever she was. And if it did happen that she died, and I could not get the one being in all the world that I care for—Edna—then make up your mind I will marry in my own rank, and have an heir who has no blot on his ancestry.”

Helen turned and hid her face in the thick fronds of a fern, and moaned a desolate, wild moan of a wounded creature hiding to die!”

“Oh, Norman, Norman!”

“Look you, girl! I believe, on my life, if I even hinted that I would marry you in the event I was left free, that you are quite equal to poisoning my poor little countess. I may be a bad man—I am; but Heaven knows there are some depths in your nature far lower than I find in mine.”

"She would need no help from me!" cried Helen. "She is dying fast enough; she goes day by day steadily to her doom. And you won't see it, and you taunt me. Fool! Wretch! I will bring you to my level, mark my words!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE.

Whenever Helen Hope introduced the name of Kenneth Keith in her frequent conversations with Violet, Violet was either silent or quickly and adroitly changed the conversation. But though not one word was said, Helen felt more and more assured that Kenneth had been the one great love of Violet's life—that in spite of herself her heart still clung to him in a silent, hopeless agony. One day she said, boldly, to Violet:

"Since it is evident that Lord Leigh does not care for you, why don't you give him up entirely, and make other friends, and find happiness with some one who would care for you? Why do you not abandon all this life that is wearing you out? Why not go away by yourself for a year or so, until you recover strength and live down your sorrow? Such a course would be a lesson to Lord Leigh. He would miss you and treat you well when you would be willing to return."

"I would not do such a thing for the world," said Violet. "Even if my husband would be glad to be rid of me, other friends would care—my aunts, Lady Burton, Edna."

"If you were not quite blinded you would see that Lady Burton is setting all her love on Miss Haviland, and trying to get her for Lord Keith. Miss Haviland will take the greatest match offered her. From the way she and Leigh exchange glances, I think if you were out of the way that would be her match. Lord Keith evidently adores her. At your dinner here the other night, when you were so sweet as to let me come and look on, dear, I saw them talking together in a window for a long time. I understood—he was pleading his suit, and she was putting him off easily, to see if the marquis would propose. She is as true as her name," said Helen.

"And why is not her name true?" demanded Violet.



"I GREW TO HATE MONEY. I FELT LIKE A PLUMED BIRD, SOON TO BE SHOT FOR ITS FEATHERS."



"OUR LIVES HAVE BEEN RUINED BY A LIE!" CRIED KEITH.

"It is, in a way, taken lately to secure property, you know."

"No, I don't know. I never heard of it."

"Do you mean to say that she has been all this time deceiving you, and you do not know that she is my old pupil, Edna Ambrose, from Cornwall and Rose Lodge?"

"What—what!" cried Violet.

"Poor child! Then they have deceived you, Lady Burton, Keith, and all. I supposed you knew. She set out to see if she could keep her empire over Leigh; no doubt he put her up to it, as you refused to invite her. They made you do it by this trick. But she sees Keith is a good match, and so she has engrossed him. Every one of them is making a tool of you, and playing with your innocence."

Violet sprang to her feet; her eyes burned, her whole frame quivered.

"You swear this is true—that she is Edna Ambrose, that all knew it but me, that Lady Burton, Edna, Kenneth, Leigh, *all* are deceiving me?"

"I swear it on my knees; they are all deceiving you—every one of them."

"Then I will fly from them forever. I will never return. I will go and hide, and die, away from deceivers. I will go to-morrow morning. Yes, yes, I will go. Oh, this is too cruel. Edna, Keith, Lady Burton, all leagued against me—against poor little Violet!"

The next May morning had not risen when from that grand Belgravian mansion might have been seen a slender figure flying through the night.

Out of her palatial home fled the heroine of the Ainslie millions. Of all the rich garb that filled her many wardrobes and closets, she had only the simple gray silk and little bonnet of Milan braid which she wore, and a change of under-clothing, in the little embroidered velvet bag in her hand. In that bag, also, she had two sets of jewels, and five guineas, while sewed in the bosom of her dress she had bank notes of one hundred pounds.

No one of the sleeping household knew the mistress had departed.

Alone, the young countess hardly knew the streets of London. She made a few turns, and, as the May dawn lightened into primrose and pink, she signaled a stray cab, and bade the sleepy driver take her to the King's Cross station.

Helen Hope had told her to take a ticket to Bedford, where she herself would join her, and they would go to a hamlet, she said, called Dee, in Derbyshire, by Derwent-water.

The morning was already hot and glaring when Violet alighted at Bedford station. She looked eagerly around for Helen, but only strange faces met her bewildered gaze. She was faint from wakeful woe and the early ride.

Until three o'clock she waited for the treacherous Helen; then, entirely overcome, she asked the old woman who tended the waiting-room to send any lady that might come to look for her to the nearest hotel; and, crossing the street, went with faltering steps into the large, barren public-house, and asked for a room.

The room was as poor as any assigned to her servants. When the staring, inquisitive chambermaid left her, she washed her hands, took off her dress, let down her hair, and considered with astonishment that she had neither dressing-sacque nor morning-gown to put on. Then she fell on the hard little bed, and, thinking of her hideous fate, of her miserable married life, of her treacherous friends, of her lost, forgetful love, Kenneth, she wept until from utter exhaustion she fell asleep.

All night long she heard through her uneasy slumbers the thunder of passing trains. Dazed and heavy from her feverish slumbers, she roused to find herself lying, partly dressed, in that strange, inhospitable room. It was a new day; twenty-four hours she had been absent from her home; and Helen, who had promised to come with her, to take her to a refuge, to nurse her as a sister, had not come to her. What had happened? Had Helen deceived her, or was she ill or dead? Or had she herself mistaken the given directions, taken a wrong railway, and gone to a wrong place? Perhaps she had made an error, and Helen had said she would meet her at Dee. Ought she to go on alone to Dee? She felt that she could not spend another day in that hideous, hot, staring, close, wretched hotel. She would go on, on somewhere where at least it was silent, cool, fresh. She arose, made the best toilet that she could, and rang for the maid.

Helen had arranged that Violet should call herself Mrs. Lester. She asked the servant to inquire of the clerk, and at the station, if a lady had been to seek for Mrs. Lester.

"There's been no one, ma'am," said the girl, returning.

"Can you bring me some breakfast in a private room?"

"Private room for eatin' is ten shillin' extra."

Violet took ten shillings from her purse, and two shillings for the girl, which promptly made the freckled servant her ally.

A moderately good meal was served, and the girl asked if she could do anything more for the lady.

"I want to go to a small place called Dee, in Derbyshire," said Violet, timidly, "and I don't know how to get there. I have never been there; it is a country place where I meant to spend the summer with a friend. I expected she would meet me here. She has lived in Dee. And as I have not found her, I fear I misunderstood, and that she has gone on to Dee to meet me, and will be alarmed for me. Tell me just what *you* would do," said Violet.

"Why, I'd go to Derby straight, seein' as it's shire town to Derby County, and there, of course, they would know where Dee was; no doubt it's some little place off the railroad, and you get to it by a fly."

"Oh, thank you," cried Violet. "And would you tell me how to get to Derby?"

The girl laughed.

"I declare, you're no better than a new-born baby to take care of yourself. To get to Derby you look at a time-table, and take the right train."

But the girl had marked the quiver of the lovely lips, the sudden filling of the brown eyes, the coming and going of red and white on the sweet young face, and her heart was moved, and her sympathies aroused.

"Don't fret yourself, there's a dear," she said. "I'll go look out your train, and buy your ticket, and see you off all right."

She went away for a little, and Violet heard her say in the hall that she "was going to look out for a young lady as didn't know a mite how to manage for 'erself, but was as pretty as a picter, and rich—by her rings."

This recalled Violet to the fact that she had on her hands a number of jewels, and at her neck a pin of rubies and diamonds. She hastily dropped all these tell-tale ornaments into her satchel, and covered her two small white hands with gray silk gloves.

"There, miss," said the girl, returning; "let me take

you to the station. There's a train starts soon for Derby. I'll tell the guard to see to you. You have to change at Chester."

She handed Violet over to the pleasant-faced guard, received another *douceur*, which charmed her, and went singing back to her bed-making, while the truant little Countess of Leigh, shut alone in a first-class carriage, sat in trembling terror at the change at Chester.

Miserable indeed were the five hours spent in the rushing train. Violet looked with heavy eyes at the landscape lying under the broad sunlight. Her head was hot and dull, her heart thumped and fluttered, hot flushes and miserable rigors passed over her slender, tired frame.

Finally the train stopped; there was a great noise of shouting and screaming; the guard came to her.

"It is Chester, if you please, my lady. I hope you have some one to meet you?"

"No one," said Violet, forlornly.

"You look very ill," said the guard, anxiously.

"It is riding in the train," said Violet, hastily bracing herself up. "I never liked it. I shall be better."

"The first train on the left-hand track will be for Derby," said the guard. "Don't miss it, my lady."

Then the car that had brought her so far whirled away, and Violet felt as if she had lost her last friend in that kindly guard.

Another long agony in a train, where several people in the carriage with her stared at her dreadfully.

Finally she was at Derby. She had sense to recognize her exhaustion and get a cup of tea. Then she began inquiring for the village of Dee.

"Dee!" No one had ever heard of such a place. "There was Belper, and Metlock, and Burton, but no Dee."

"A small country place," explained Violet, "on the river Derwent; off the railroad, probably."

But no one had ever heard of Dee. The head-waiter said he had fished all up and down Derwent water, and never heard of a Dee in Derbyshire; and then the station-agent got a gazetteer, and proved to her out of print that the shire of Derby had no place in it called Dee.

Violet felt as if her reason were forsaking her. No Dee! Where, then, should she go? Where find Helen Hope? What did it mean? Was she betrayed? She turned away

from the little group about her, went to a window, and sat down to try and collect herself. Her suspicions were aroused.

Had Helen basely lied to her? Had she played with her miseries, and deceived her with that story about Edna Ambrose, a plot of all against her? Perhaps Helen herself had schemed to drive her to this miserable escape so as to make fresh trouble for her, or open a way for herself to Leigh. She thought she had better go back home. And yet how should she explain her flight, and those two wretched days and that dismal night passed in absence from her husband's roof? How mad, how wicked she had been, after all her resolutions to be good.

She lost all control of herself for the moment, and burst into tears, and sobs shook her frame.

The waiting-woman came hastily to her.

"Miss, what's wrong? Are you in any trouble? Shall we send for any one?"

And, as Violet could not answer, the woman held some salts near her face, and bathed her forehead from a glass of water.

But that weeping, for which she hated herself, and of which she was heartily ashamed, saved her for the time. She recovered her composure.

She thanked the waiting-woman, and said, quietly:

"No, I want nothing; you need send for no one. I am over tired from the long trip, and riding in the train always makes me a little ill. I am better now. I felt disappointed at not seeing a friend, but I can go on alone very well. I know just what to do."

So she slipped a shilling in the woman's hand, which silver being more potent than words, she was allowed to arrange her hair and bathe her face in the little dressing-room, and so slip out of the side door of the station, and go her way.

Oh, to get away from the town, from the burning pave, the curious eyes, the bold faces, the strident voices! Oh, to get into the blessed country, to be shaded by trees, to hear birds sing, to tread on soft grass!

She threaded one street after another, and after a time passed the intervening rows of shops and dwellings, and came by open fields.

A stile led into a field, and across the field the fringe of

alders, and willows, and poplars showed where the river ran.

She longed for the murmur of the waters, the freshness of the banks, and so crossed the stile and field to the foot-path that ran along blue Derwent's side. All the world was in the glory of the May. Clover, red and white, shook fragrance from its crowded bloom, the pink-tipped daisies starred the grass, and all along the water-ways blossomed the golden pyramids consecrated to St. John.

Through this bloom and beauty wandered Violet of Leigh, each instant with a more sickening sense of desolation and fatigue. Unaccustomed to such long exertion, every nerve and muscle ached sorely from the long strain. A refuge she must find at once, or fall by the way.

A neat cottage was near, facing the river, and surrounded by a rose-garden. A tall, very trim, neat woman leaned on the gate, and, though her sharp face was anything but comforting, Violet timidly perferred her request.

"Had she a spare room for a boarder, for a night or a few days?"

"A room!" cried the woman, shrilly. "Not I. What has one to think of a pretty young miss wandering about the country in a silk gown and a Paris hat? I know better. I've been a lady's maid, and——"

Violet staid to hear no more; a flood of crimson dyed her pallid face at the implied insult. Had she, Violet Ainslie, Countess of Leigh, fallen so low as to be taken for a vagrant, and spurned by an ex-lady's maid. Maddened by humiliation, she hurried along with renewed force until, hearing steps closely pursuing her, she turned abruptly, and looked into a face young and gentle as her own."

Violet was looking at a young girl of plain but sympathetic face. The stranger had on a blue check gown, and a straw bonnet woven by her own hands. She was slender and neat in appearance, and while evidently a cottager, like many on the Leigh estates, had the air of one used to the ways of the town.

"Were you looking for a lodging?" she asked, gently.

"Yes," said Violet, hurriedly. "I was looking for a friend. I have missed her, and lost my way, and I am so tired, I can hardly move. I am frightened, too, for I am not used to—being by myself."

"I can give you a lodging," said the girl. "I am alone

in my cottage—it is just near. There are only two of us left, and father is night hand this month. Our place is little, but it is clean and safe.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you!” said Violet. I would pay——”

“I don’t do it for pay—but—because you are young, and seem in trouble, and I like to do what I can. I had a sister once; she died; it is for her sake.”

Then seeing Violet was faint and trembling, she took her little bag from her, and drawing her hand through her arm, led her to a tiny cottage, very old, and covered with hop vines.

The young girl placed Violet in a chintz-cushioned rocking-chair. She took off Violet’s hat, loosened her dress, brought water, and bathed her feet, doing all simply and quietly. She looked a little surprised at Violet’s costly silk hose and fine French boots, but said nothing until she had undressed her exhausted guest, and put upon her the night-dress which Violet took from the embroidered bag. The richness of the cambric garment evidently puzzled the young hostess, but she was still silent, and opening one of the beds, said, as she shook up the clean, white pillow, and turned over the snowy sheet:

“It is as sweet as ever can be, miss; you need not fear.”

“Indeed, indeed, I am very grateful,” said Violet.

“Once you are easy in bed, I will make you a cup of tea, and a bit of toast,” said the girl, but before she did this she shook out, dusted, and folded all Violet’s clothes. Then she made a fire, and prepared tea and toast for Violet, and porridge for herself, chatting freely of her own affairs, as cottage maidens will, but showing a singular delicacy about asking questions of Violet.

“I work in a factory in town,” she said. “I’m the last one of our family father has left. Father works at the station. We were six once, but now only two. I’m keeping company with a young man, and we mean to be married as soon as we have saved enough to furnish us a little house where father can live with us, and when Joe gets advanced in the factory. I am Mary Miller, at the box factory in Derby. In the morning I am off by five, but you needn’t rise till you are rested. I’ll leave you some breakfast, and you must sleep till you are done.

You have only to shut the door when you go out; no one ever meddles here—we've naught to lose."

Then the tea was brought to Violet's bed, almost as nicely as Kate could have done it, and surrounded by this Arcadian simplicity, Violet fell into a troubled, aching sleep.

Her slumber deepened toward morning. When she finally woke the sun was high, and Mary Miller was gone.

Violet sat up in bed and looked about. Evidently she must leave this quiet shelter, but where should she go, what should she do? The sleep, the silence, gave her strength for reflection. She would go to the nearest village or town, seek board or lodgings, and as soon as she could secure a room to sit down in, and material for writing, she would write at once for Kate—good, kind, sensible Kate, her life-long friend—Kate would tell her what to do, and Kate would take care of her. She rose and dressed. Mary Miller had left a glass of rich new milk and a slice of brown bread on the table for her. Violet drank the milk, and then pinned a sovereign inside Mary's pillow-case, where no stray caller would be likely to find it, but Mary surely would. She looked with filling eyes at the tidy, humble home, where she had found such Christian treatment; she remembered how it was written, "I was a stranger and ye took me in," and she felt that the "blessing of one ready to perish" would come home to the gracious factory maiden.

"I will help her," she said, "as soon as I am once more safe and settled; I will send a hundred pounds to Mary, and she shall marry the man she loves."

The thought of making another happy cheered Violet. She went out once more with better courage.

The morning was fresh, dewy, lovely; the day promised heat, but now all was fair and sparkling; a dainty breeze stirred Violet's stray rings of hair, and dried the tears on her cheeks.

For a little while hope sustained her in her way, hope of shelter, of soon summoning Kate, who could "take care of her"—and oh, how she needed care, how ill and worn she felt!

The sun climbed apace to the zenith, the breeze died away; Violet's tottering limbs and blistered feet could hardly carry her. She had not gone so very far, though

it seemed miles and miles. Her head reeled, sharp, fierce pains shot through her arms and back, and finally, with a low cry, she threw up her hands, and groping blindly, fell, in blessed unconsciousness of her misery.

The spot where she fell was a little copse of hazel bushes and ferns; the great verdant brake and the tender hazel leaves leaned over her and sheltered her; bees hummed her a slumber-song; butterflies swayed above her in the warm, golden air. She came a little from her swoon, not enough to realize herself, and her mind was full of the Lincolnshire woods, the cool, deep retreats about the old Grange, and she saw again the face of Kenneth, her lover, and she heard his voice murmuring sweet words that she had a right to hear, and his hand touched hers, and she was sheltered, and happy, and at rest. She knew not these were drifting, fevered dreams, and that her pillow was but green brake, not Kenneth's heart, and that it was a truant butterfly that lightly touched her hand, and she was lost and alone, fallen wounded by the rough wayside of life.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“OH! WHAT HAVE I DONE?”

The sun that shines on, over all human joy and pain, had reached and passed mid-heaven. The insects whirled tirelessly on the grasses, but the birds had stolen to the leafy shades, and the flowers drooped in the heat, while Violet still lay unfriended in her covert. She tossed and moaned, and then began to babble in a fevered dream. Out upon the still air went the words of her complaining:

“Why does no one care for me? Why do they all deceive me? Oh, I am so alone, so alone! I am lost and afraid. Why don't I die?”

These moanings reached, at last, a human ear. A woman, old and plain, but singularly large-framed, erect, and vigorous, a cottage woman, in a white cap, a check linsey gown, and a great white apron, was passing by. She stopped at the unexpected sounds, then followed whence they came, and finally parted the green branches, and looked in on Violet in her ferny nest.

“Goodness save us!” cried the dame, “who are you, my little pretty, and where ever did you come from?”

“Kenneth! Kenneth! Have you forgotten me?” cried Violet.

The old woman bent down and moved Violet gently.

“Whoever you are, my dear,” said the old woman, “you need to be taken care of quick and well, or into your grave you will go.”

So she gathered Violet up in her strong arms, as if the girl had been a mere child, and she did not neglect to slip the handle of the bag over her wrist, and take the silk umbrella in her hand.

Not vainly had Mistress Magery Rogers been called “the strongest woman in all Derbyshire.” She carried her own sixty years, and the slender figure of the Countess of Leigh, as if both were trifles, and with long, firm steps, she passed the hazel bushes, and turned into a narrow path, and so to a small thatched cottage. Here she entered. A great dog, gray and heavy with age, met her, and there also came a big, tortoise-shell cat. These were her only retainers. A bed, with a white fringed counterpane, stood in one corner, and on this she laid Violet, and began at once to undress her. As she took off one article after another of the dainty clothing, she exclaimed:

“Why, this must be a princess at least! Did one ever see the like? Sure, this petticoat is like a wedding-gown, and here’s one might be good enough for a christening-robe.”

She had hung up Violet’s bag, and seemed to have no thought of looking into it, but when she wanted a night-dress, went to a chest of drawers that stood in a corner, and took from it a gown carefully laid up in lavender. No nurse could be more skillful and gentle than this strong cottage dame, and under her ministrations Violet, cooled, soothed, calmed, fell asleep.

The dame looked at her in her deep slumber—so fair, so helpless, so like a little child—and shaking her head, said:

“Here’s a mystery, here’s a mystery! However, she must be well cared for; and as I need things from the ’pothecary and shop, I’ll go out again. I wonder if I shall meet any more lost princesses! It’s like the fairy tales I used to tell the children. Heaven send her sound sleep till I get back!”

So, shading the windows, the dame went out, gently closing the door.

Quiet, quiet, was the warm May day, a true forerunner of the summer. Violet had passed in the second hour of her slumber; when a stealthy step came around the cottage; the door was softly pushed open, and a queer figure entered the still room—a short, spare man, in a flannel dressing-gown, carpet slippers, and with a velvet cap pulled forward to his bushy eyebrows, giving his face a singular, sinister appearance. His beard was long and ragged, as if never visited by razor or scissors; his eye had the wildness of insanity.

He went straight to the dame's work-basket; and not finding what he wished, jerked open the table-drawer.

The noise woke Violet, whose slumbers had from childhood been carefully guarded. She lifted herself on one elbow—her beautiful hair disheveled over her shoulders—and seeing the strange, humble cottage room, the coarse if clean bed, and the grotesque man, she gave a scream.

The man whirled about, and stood looking at her, as if highly delighted.

“Who are you?” shrieked poor Violet.

“The wolf, my angel, the wolf! and you are dear little Red Riding Hood, asleep in her grandmother's bed! Your grandmother is out, isn't she? Hope she'll never come back. Meanwhile I can eat you.”

He showed a double row of great white teeth, gleaming from under his mustache. Violet had never seen anything so hideous. She was so frozen with horror that she could neither move nor speak.

“See my head! Handsome, ain't it?” cried the man, and snatching off his cap, he showed a shaven portion of scalp with a great red scar across it. “Looks as if an Indian had got after me, don't it? Where does your fool grandmother keep her knives? Here's one! Shall I do it for you, or for me, or for both of us?”

Violet gave an agonizing shriek. A loud and clear voice from without answered her:

“Coming!”

The man dropped the knife, and crept under the table.

“How did you get here?” cried Dame Magery, dashing in, and dragging him forth. “This *was* a time for you to break out! You're trickier than Satan, indeed you are.”

She marched him off—he making no resistance. Presently she returned to the trembling Violet.

"He's safe, my dearie. He'll trouble you no more."

"Oh, who is he? Who is the fearful creature?"

"Just a crazy man I'm in charge of. And he is well shut in now. Fear him no more. There, he is sent off."

"But who are you?" asked Violet, clinging to the strong brown hand.

"I'm Dame Magery Rogers. I found you fallen in the field, and a bit feverish and light-headed. Come now—drink what is in this cup, and lie down to sleep. I'll not leave you. There, my dear; you are as safe as a child on its mother's lap, and welcome as flowers in May. Lie there, and I'll sing to you."

She put Violet back on her pillow, and began to sing.

As the verses crooned on, Violet fell asleep. She slept most of the time until next morning. When she awoke, the episode of the crazy man seemed to her a dream of her fevered sleep.

The dame waited on her with motherly care, and after she had eaten her breakfast, Violet lay back on her pillow, with a great sense of rest and comfort. Only there was that dream—or was it a reality? She spoke:

"Will you please tell me if there is a horrible crazy man, or did I dream it?"

"You've had many ill dreams," said the dame, evasively.

"There's no one here to harm you, my pretty; you are safe."

"How kind and strong you look!" said Violet; "but I seem to know your face—it looks familiar."

"I used to be a nurse. My family are dead, and now I live alone."

"I should like to stay here—for a long, long while," said Violet. "Would you let me stay with you? I will make you no trouble. I shall be quite well by to-morrow, and I know well how to wait on myself."

"Where is your mother, child? demanded the old woman.

"Dead long ago, or I should have gone to her. I would not have needed to go away at all, if I had a mother or father or any one to love me or take care of me."

"No one to love you, my little dear. Sure there is some one who ought to love you well."

"Yes, but he doesn't; no one does. I don't know what it is in me, that no one can love me, or be true to me."

"But you should make people do their duty by you, my poor little dear."

"I can't—I've tried—it is no use. It made me so desperate, that I felt as if I must run away from them all. I like it here, it is so quiet, and you look so kind and so true. Won't you let me stay? I'll pay you. I have some money. There are a hundred pounds in that bag hanging on the back of your chair."

"A hundred pounds! Save us! I never saw so much money in my life, at once!" cried the old dame, jumping up and eyeing the bag in awe.

"Oh, that is not much—but—it will take care of me for a month or so, won't it—till I get strong, and earn more?"

"A month or two! How ever have you been living, child?"

"Why, like the rest of the people around me, I suppose. I never learned much, nor did much but amuse myself, and go about, and enjoy music, and flowers, and pictures, and fine things. I suppose it is as the French say. I have been a rose, and lived as roses live, but I can do differently."

The old woman respectfully took the gray plush bag and laid it by Violet's side. Violet was ready to open it at once, saying:

"I will give you the money; only I must get some changes of clothes, a very few, not costly; and by the time the rest is gone I will earn some more. People do earn their living, and so can I—I can learn. You will tell me. Are there not ways? It will not take much to support me."

"But it will be long before you can begin, my dear."

"Oh, no; I will begin at once—next week. I can embroider, and make lace; and I could teach music to little children, maybe. Why, any young girl can support herself. How much does one need?"

"But two, my dear—two needs more."

"Two, certainly. But there is no question of two—only of me. Kate could do for herself. But if you will keep me, maybe I'd not send for Kate; so it is only one."

"But there may be a little child, my dear."

"No, no," said Violet; "I've done hoping for that. It might have made things right; but it's too late."

"My dear, have you run away from your friends?"

"Yes, I have. I could not endure the deceit, the——"

“And will you tell me your name, my dearie?”

“I’d rather not—only Violet.”

The dame shook her head.

“My dear, you should go back, and set things right—if not for yourself, for the little child, you know.”

“But there isn’t any child!” cried Violet, pettishly.

“But there will be, my dearie, after a little. Surely you think of that! Surely you know that!”

Violet seized her arm.

“Tell me! Do you mean—do you think I am to have a child?—a little child of my own? Quick—speak!”

“Why, certainly—sure, you know——”

But the little Countess of Leigh had fallen back in her pillows, covered her face with her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

“Oh, what have I done!”

“Hush, hush, my dear! Don’t take on so! Oh, pray think of that little child! Be calm, my dear. You are so young, so sweet and pretty, surely you can make it all right. You will go back; you will have justice done to you; you will not bring shame on the little child; you will be married to the father, my dear! Bad man he must be to deceive a child like you!”

But Violet had started up in bed, with flaming eyes and a crimson face. She cried out:

“How dare you! What do you mean? Oh, how can you be so wicked! Do you mean to say you think I am not married?”

“You have run away alone,” said the old dame; “your hand has no ring on it.”

“Judged me by my rings! Oh, you wicked woman, to think ill of me just for that!” cried poor Violet, furiously tearing away in a frenzy at the plush bag, and tossing on the floor the laced night-robe, and the soiled silk hose, and the change of cambric, and a fluff of kerchiefs, and then she shook the bag out and rolled on the counterpane before the amazed old dame, a watch and chain, some sovereigns, a jeweled brooch, and a heap of rings. From these she snatched two, the half-hoop engagement-ring and the unhappy gold shackle that had sealed her bitter fate at St. George’s: and thrusting them on her finger, she held out a little quivering hand, saying:

“Now are you satisfied? I took off the hateful things

for fear of being robbed; but here they are, and I hope you'll not think so ill of me! And you may believe that my little baby will be as good a baby as ever was born in this world!"

"Oh, my dear, my little dear!" said the dame, bending over her, "it joys my heart to hear this, for I have been sick of soul for your care ever since I brought you in;" and tears rolled over her old cheeks.

Violet threw up her arms and clasped the wrinkled neck.

"Forgive me! Please forgive me! I will love you forever. Are you sure, very sure, about—about——"

"Yes, sure as sure, if you don't do yourself an ill turn."

"But what have I done? Oh, what have I done by running away?"

"You'll send for your friends and explain all, and no one will blame you—they'll make all right for the child's sake, my dear. It will never do to keep on in aught that might shame or hurt your baby, my sweet. By these rich things, you come of good family."

Violet was fumbling among her trinkets. She said:

"I forgot; the money is not here. It is sewed in my dress. I will do whatever you tell me. My husband doesn't love me; but, for the child's sake, he may let me come back. Oh, I hope he will! I don't want my poor little child turned out of its rights."

"And now, my lovey, for the child's sake, you'll tell me your name, won't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Violet, readily. "I am Violet, Countess of Leigh, from Leigh Towers, Sussex."

But, to her amazement, the old dame flung herself over the bed, gathered her in her arms, rocked her on her bosom, and lamented over her, and loved her.

"Oh, my lady, my own sweet lady! Oh, my dear little mistress! Thank God, who sent you to me, my dear!"

"But who are you?" said Violet. when the dame's eager words gave way to sighs and silence.

"My dear lady surely knows Adam Moreland?"

"Lord Leigh's valet? Indeed yes—good old Adam."

"I am his twin sister Magery, and I lived at the Towers till I was eighteen, and came away with Lady Fanny Leigh when she married, and now I live on a pension she left me,

Adam has told me about the sweet young lady my lord married; and, indeed, my dear lady, I guessed as much as you were not happy, but I never dreamed it would come to that you should fly away by yourself, sick and miserable, with only what you carry in your hand. Surely, my lord is not so cruel to you as that?"

"No, no. I see all, Magery; it is my own fault. I have been hasty, and foolish, and impatient. Oh, I have been wrong. I have thrown all away!"

"No, no, my dearie!" said the old woman, soothingly. "My lord will be most anxious for you, and for fear for the child——"

"But he does not know about that, nor did I."

"Then, my lady dear, as soon as he hears of that he will be proud and kind, and never be a word angry for your running off. The hope of the little one will be your peace-making. No doubt you were a wee out of your head when you went."

"No, no, I was not," said Violet, seizing the hand of the old family retainer, and pouring out all her heart; "but I was so wretched and lonely. My husband does not love me, and his words and looks hurt me; and I felt as if all my friends were forgetting me. And then, there was one—she seemed to be my friend—she kept urging me to go."

"The wicked sinner!" broke out Dame Magery Rogers. "She had her own purpose in it, I'll be bound."

"I've no doubt she did. She was as false as the rest. She promised to meet me, and she did not; she left me to be forlorn and lost, looking for a place that never was; and she will put Norman against me."

"Hush, my dearie, don't vex yourself. Nothing will put him against you, with a child looked for. The Leighs are wonderful anxious for countenance, always."

"Yes, Norman is very desirous of a son," said Violet.

"And a son there will be," said the dame, courageously.

"Such a beauty as never was, I'll be bound."

But poor Violet must pour out her whole story.

"It was not Lord Leigh alone, Magery, that drove me wild. It was—there was a lady—such a lovely girl I had come to love her more than I had any one else in my life, but one; and she deceived me, in her name and her friendship, and all. If Edna Ambrose had not deceived me, I

could have endured. Oh, Edna! Edna! how could you be so cruel?"

"But you must be quiet, my dear lady; and hark to me—Miss Ambrose never deceived you, sure. Some one has lied about her. It is not in her to deceive. She is like an angel out of heaven. You could trust her to the world's end. My lady, Adam and I are dear to each other; and we write long, long letters, and he comes twice the year to see me, and knowing me true to the house of Leigh, and never one to talk out of it, he has told me many things, else he would not mention. I can tell you the whole story of Miss Ambrose, my dear lady; and you'll see she could not deceive any one, nor come between husband and wife."

Then Dame Mageey sat down by the bed, and placing Violet comfortably on her pillows, she smoothed her hair and fanned her, and in a low, pleasant voice, with tender looks and words, she told the story of Edna Ambrose; of all she had been and wished to be, as old Adam knew all, who had often seen her, who distributed her bounty to country and city poor, and who revered even the shadow of the beautiful and gracious girl. When the story was ended Violet gave a deep sigh.

"Dame, how rash and wrong I have been. Bring me paper and pen, and I will write to Edna to come to me."

"No, my dearie; write me a telegram out, and I'll go to Belper with it this blessed hour."

CHAPTER XL.

"OH, EDNA! EDNA! HAVE YOU COME TO ME?"

The telegram which Violet sent to Edna ran thus:

"Come to me at once. Bring Kate, and some clothes. Say not a word till you see me. Come to Belper, in Derbyshire.

"VIOLET L."

This potent message found Edna in deepest grief. The news of Violet's disappearance had overwhelmed her with distress, which was intensified by Lord Keith's agony.

Lady Burton was ill, and the horrible disappearance of her beloved Violet was sedulously concealed from her.

Since Violet fled, affairs had gone thus: Violet fled on Tuesday morning, and on Friday evening, about six, the dispatch was handed to Edna. On Tuesday, at nine o'clock, Kate, going to her lady's room, had found her absent. This surprised her; but, seeing that a simple walking suit was gone, she concluded her lady had been restless, and had taken a sudden notion to stroll in the green park. Lord Leigh breakfasted about eleven, and made no remark at not seeing Violet, as several times of late she had taken breakfast in her room. As Violet was still absent at lunch-time, Kate, though uneasy, fancied she had gone to Lady Burton's, and was lunching there. But Violet was going to an afternoon tea with Lady Grace Churchill, and, as she did not return in time to dress, the faithful maid became greatly alarmed. She went to Lord Leigh, when he came in, and told him she did not know where her lady was, and was frightened. He replied, roughly, that "the countess was not a babe in leading strings, and that Kate was a fool. No doubt Lady Leigh was visiting her Aunt Ainslie." The anxious Kate went to Mrs. Ainslie's, and found, from her chief friend among the footmen, that Lady Leigh had not been there that day. She waited a while, and then, in an off-hand manner, while seeming to be merely on an errand among the maids at each house, discovered that the young countess had not been at the Countess Montessor's, at Lady Clare Hartington's, or Lady Churchill's.

Lord Leigh spent the evening in the House of Lords, and slept at his club. Kate spent a night of agony, and on Wednesday morning, as Violet was leaving Bedford, Kate went to Lady Burton's to tell her story to Miss Haviland. Up to that time no one had a hint of the disappearance of the young wife.

Edna, terribly alarmed, called Lord Keith to hear Kate's tale, and Keith went off to find Lord Leigh, whom he succeeded in reaching about noon.

Leigh went into a paroxysm of fury at the story. He loudly rated his lady's childishness, folly, melancholy, idiocy. When he had exhausted himself, Kenneth told him that illness, accident, or strange and terrible villainy, must have overtaken Lady Leigh; and that it behooved them to seek for her promptly and quietly, and not occasion a scandal.

"Never a wife disappeared," said Keith, "but her hus-

band was blamed for it, and all his affairs searched out. Can't you see, Leigh, that you should be quiet and busy?"

Leigh took this hint. It touched his selfishness and his family pride. He called Adam to the conference, and Adam said that his lady had spoken several times of Leigh Towers, and the people there, and had said she must go there and stay a day or two.

"Depend upon it, she is there," said Leigh. "Let Adam go down after her."

Adam went, and returned on Thursday morning at two o'clock, saying Lady Leigh had not been heard from at the Towers.

When Adam returned, Lord Leigh was not at his mansion, but at a suite of chambers near the "Albany," a retreat which he had had in his bachelor days, and now often used during the Parliamentary season. Left alone, after Adam's communication, he paced up and down his sitting-room in great distress and excitement. The flight of Violet must presently be made known, and the myriad eyes of society would be turned on him. Even the detective police might be called into service—and who could tell with what results of investigation?

"My lord, there's a lady to see you. She is that Miss Hope—that—you knew in—Cornwall," said Adam, returning.

"Away with her! I won't see her!" cried Leigh, furiously.

"My lord, she says it is important. She may bring you word of my lady."

"She! How could she? Lady Leigh did not know her."

"If you please, my lord, she is Mrs. Ainslie's governess, and has often brought the little misses to see my lady."

"Send her in," cried Lord Leigh; and, dropping on a divan, put his elbows on his knees, and his face in his hands.

Some one sat down by him, and tried to draw away his hands. Helen Hope's voice whispered:

"Norman, Norman, speak to me. I have come. Your wife has left you—but I am here."

"And I would you were anywhere else," retorted Leigh. "Who asked you here? Why do you haunt me?"

"Because I am resolved that you shall fulfill your old promise, and marry me. You promised, on the cliff in Cornwall."

"I did not. If I did, I jested. Marry you! Woman, I have a wife."

"But she has left you. She is either dead, or gone with a lover. In either case you are free. If she has fled, you must divorce her. What matter? You do not love her."

"But, fiend, if I am indifferent to her, I hate, abhor you!"

"You call me names; you loathe me; and yet the more I love you," said Helen, madly. "Such love as mine must create love. Oh, Norman, you are free of her! Give me one word of love, of hope."

"Helen, you are insane! If I were free—as I am not—to choose a wife, you know well where my heart would be laid."

"Before Edna Ambrose? Too late. She is betrothed to the Marquis of Alwood. He offered himself at the Duchess of Grafton's ball, Tuesday night. Mrs. Ainslie told me. She saw them in the conservatory together. She said she knew it all."

Leigh rose to his feet, livid with jealous rage. He quivered as in a strong agony.

"He shall not have her—never, never! I will——"

"Kill him, too? A second murder?" hissed Helen.

"Murder? Woman?"

He reeled back from her.

"Where is the man that came to you, with fatal proof, in 'The Earl's Folly?'" said Helen, in a deep, low tone.

"That man? He is nothing to me. Where should he be?"

"Norman Leigh, you know where he is!"

"Never, never!" said Lord Leigh, passionately. "I never laid a finger on him, as Heaven is my witness!"

"Perjurer! false, forsworn—murderer! And yet I love you. I only will stand by you—and help you hide your crime!"

"There is no crime to hide," protested Leigh, cold beads running over his contorted face.

"I leave you—I wait," said Helen, and glided away.

She was scarcely gone when Lord Keith came in. He

was distracted by Leigh's indifference, in regard to the search for his wife. "I warn you, Leigh," he said, "that as an Englishman and a peer, it will be my duty to notify the police if Lady Leigh is not found within a week."

"I am going to Sussex myself to look for her," said Leigh.

Edna passed the time in self-reproach, finding the cause of Violet's flight in her own concealed name. Then, in the depths of her despair, she received the dispatch, and telling Lady Burton that she had been called to a friend in distress, bade her "good-by for a day or two." Her preparations were swift and simple. Then she wrote a note to Keith, and gave it to his valet to hand him as soon as he returned, about midnight, as he had promised. The note ran thus:

"MY FRIEND AND BROTHER: Stop your search, and keep silence until you hear from me, within twenty-four hours. I think light has come, and all will be well.
EDNA."

She sent for a cab so that her movements should not be known in the house, and going to Lord Leigh's, found that he was in Sussex. This suited her, for she had no idea of explaining to him; but taking Kate into her confidence she explained as far as she could and they packed a portmanteau of clothes, and Violet's dressing case. Again in a cab, they went to King's Cross Station, and with hearts divided between hope and fear, the loving friend and the faithful maid rode northward through the brief summer night.

Mistress Rogers, calculating the time of trains carefully, was sure Miss Ambrose would reach Belper early in the morning, and had instructed her friend, the station master, to have a gig in readiness to take her to the cottage.

When Edna and Kate alighted from the train, they were met by an elderly man, saying:

"If you are Miss Ambrose, there is a gig waiting for you."

The May morning was sweet and bright, the birds sang, the flowers were all abloom. Dame Rogers' cottage, with its heavy stretch, where the buttercups and daisies were blooming high in air, the drapery of vines, the golden frame of nasturtium flowers, made a pretty picture of peace.

The tall old dame, clean and smiling, sprang into the door-way, but Edna, with not a look at her, sprang into the room, and toward the bed, where eager arms were held out to her, and a loved voice cried:

"Oh, Edna, dear, darling Edna, have you come to take care of me!"

Violet was fondly folded in the arms of Edna. Dame Magery stood looking on with lifted hands, as if calling down a benediction on the happy scene. Kate dropped herself in a heap on the floor, clasped her hands round her knees, and incontinently burst into tears. This seemed to serve as a signal to the rest, and the four delivered themselves over heartily to the feminine occupation of weeping.

Finally, relieved from a mental strain which had lasted for four days, Edna recovered herself, and tenderly caressing Violet's pretty head, asked:

"Oh, my little darling, why did you do it?"

"I was so unhappy," whispered Violet, hiding her face by putting Edna's soft, white hand over it. "I thought no one loved me, and—and that you had deceived me—about the name—and all."

"I see my error. I own I was very wrong. I did not mean to be," said Edna. "I longed to help you. I have an old sisterly kindness for your husband, and I want him to be a good, happy man, and I saw you, one day last summer, asleep in a hammock, and I fell in love with you at first sight, as they say, and I cannot tell you how dear you are to me, and as you had taken a prejudice against me, in my name, Ambrose, and would not meet me, I wanted to win your love in a name that has been made my own, and then tell you the truth, and be your sister and friend all your life-long. Say you forgive me, and will be my friend, Violet."

"There is nothing to forgive, and my friendship is now less than ever worth having. Edna, you see what I have done. I have run away like a foolish or wicked woman, and now every one will condemn me, and I shall be ashamed to show my face anywhere, forever more."

"My dear, you are all mistaken. No person, not even your aunts, knew you had run away. Lord Leigh asserted that you had gone to the Towers for a few days' rest. Even Kate did not know differently until I told her last night.

We have kept all from Lady Burton, for fear of retarding her recovery. Only your husband, Adam and Lord Keith, and I, know it. Do not let that thought worry you."

"And—what did they say—or do?" faltered Violet.

"They resolved to look quietly for you, for a week. They were in terrible distress for you, but I left a note saying to cease search—all was well."

"You and—Kenneth are very good to me, Edna."

Edna was startled at something in the child's tone. She put her hand under the round chin, and turned Violet's face to look into her eyes.

"Do you think there is anything particular between Lord Keith and me, Violet?"

"I think," burst out Violet, passionately, "that you are both the best people in all the world—and I wish, yes, I *do* wish, you might love each other, and be married, and be happy forever."

"Poor child; this is self-conquest," said Edna, as she bent down and kissed her; "but Kenneth has told me all. He has buried his heart and his love, since God wills it so. But as for me, Violet, Keith will only be to me a brother, and I to him a sister. I think I am otherwise attracted, dear!"

"Don't you just despise me for a weak creature?" sobbed Violet. "I don't wonder Norman can't love me."

"Oh, my dear, but he does love you!"

Kate and Dame Magery having finished their crying, had amicably united in preparing a breakfast. Magery was cooking dainty dishes in an out-kitchen, and Kate was setting the table in the large room, making various errands out to the dame, while Miss Ambrose and Violet talked. One of Kate's conferences with Magery was longer than the others, and she rushed back from it with a face full of importance and radiant with joy.

"Oh, my dear little mistress, to think it should ever be!" cried Kate, seizing Violet's hands, and covering them with kisses. "You're made now, my dearie, and all will go well with you, and my lord won't know how to do enough for you when we have a fine little earl to show for ourselves!"

"What!" cried Edna. "Oh, Violet is this true?"

"Yes!" said Violet, again having recourse to her usual refuge, tears; "and now I'm frightened to death for fear

Leigh will be angry, and won't let me come back—and that my foolishness will be the shame and ruin of my little child."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear; what are you saying? Why, Leigh shall come here himself and bring you back as loving as can be."

"Never, never!" murmured Violet.

"He will, for he must," said Edna, decisively.

"Come now, if you please, Miss Haviland," said Kate, assuming airs and bustling about, "my lady is not to be excited. She has had over much of it. I must get her dressed for her breakfast, poor dear lady, she must have on her own things."

Edna, with a laugh, and a fond kiss to Violet, went to the kitchen, where she put on a big Holland's apron of Dame Rogers' and made a salad, and picked over a plate of strawberries, in a style that elicited hearty applause from the dame.

"May I come in?" called the musical voice of Edna, after a little; and she entered, bringing a dish of crimson berries in one hand, and a plate of delicate bleached salad in the other.

"Why, Violet, my love, you look yourself again."

Violet held out her hand to her friend.

"Edna, let me thank and bless you for coming to me. I will always love you and take your advice, and never, never believe a word against you again."

"Who was it spoke against me, and told you I was Miss Ambrose?" asked Edna, looking at her closely.

"It was—Helen Hope. She is governess at my aunt's."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Edna. "I do not like to speak against any one, especially one working for daily bread. But Helen Hope is not fit company for you, or fit guide for your aunt's children, or safe friend for her daughters."

"If ever I get home, I will try to do good, and not do evil. Norman warned me against Helen Hope. Oh, Edna, I promised Lady Burton that I would live for truth and honor, and see how I have come out!"

"Come to breakfast, my dearie, and henceforth you will make better work of it, living for your husband and your child."

When breakfast was over, Violet lay back in the big chair by the window, and Edna came and sat by her.

"Violet, I am going to return to London by the one o'clock train. I shall see your husband, and he will come here for you, and take you home. Do not look so alarmed. He will come in kindness and good faith, and you will return with him, and no one will ever know of this little truant expedition. He will be here on Monday. Until then, you will be safe and happy, and picking up strength here, with Kate and our good dame."

"Oh, Edna! I dislike to lose sight of you for one minute."

"It will only be for a little, my dear."

"But you will be worn out! You traveled all last night, and you will go off without rest."

"Happiness rests me—the happiness of finding you. I never get worn out when I am doing things for my friends," laughed Edna.

And so the one o'clock train from Belper carried Edna Haviland back to London.

CHAPTER XLI.

"HEAR MY PRAYER, NORMAN!"

Night had fallen over London, with Edna Ambrose, that fair maiden knight-errant arrived at Lady Burton's residence. Lord Keith who was pacing frantically up and down the library, heard the knock of the cabman, and rushed into the hall. He seized Edna's hand and led her to the library, too anxious to utter a word, but his burning eyes read in her tranquil, cheerful face good news.

"It is all right, Kenneth," said Edna, clasping his hand, and her face shining with the reflex of that joy that is in heaven over penitent sinners. "Violet is safe and only waits her husband's going for her, to return to her home. Her running off was all the result of the deceitful counsel of an enemy. She went in a paroxysm of grief, thinking you and I and your mother had deceived her. Now, all is well, and I hope for the very best, for her and her husband."

"But he—what will he do, or say? I fear he will be inclined to play the brute with the poor child."

"No, he will not. Every step of her way can be traced and proved. Kind women have watched over her from the first, and she is now with Adam Moreland's widowed sister, a retainer of the house of Leigh. Where is Lord Leigh? I must see him at once."

"He came back from searching in Sussex this evening about five. He seemed worried and angry. I begged him to stay here, saying I hoped for news by midnight, but he went off angry and grumbling. I will try and find him, but doubt if I can."

In fact, Lord Leigh was not to be found until Sunday about church time, when a messenger from Edna brought him to Lady Burton's. Edna was waiting for him alone in a little morning-room.

Though Norman Leigh was alarmed, angered, and distressed by the flight of his unloved wife, and the social consequences that might ensue, he was yet able to be mastered by the one deep passion of his life, and at the sight of the beautiful Edna, Violet and her dangers were forgotten.

Edna looked kindly at him; Edna summoned him; Edna's voice fell gently on his ears; Edna's soft, white hand lay in his clasp. In the intoxication of this joy all else was forgotten. He could scarcely restrain himself from falling at her feet, and protesting his undying, his hourly growing adoration.

"Norman," said Edna, in the eager joy of her heart, "I bring you news of your wife—of our Violet!"

Leigh's face fell.

"I'm glad to hear of her. I hope to save a public search. Heaven knows what accusations Keith was looking at me! Where is the woman?"

Edna coldly withdrew her hand, and stepped back from him.

"Norman Leigh! I will not answer you when you take that tone of her whom you promised to love and cherish. What was your vow at the altar?"

Lord Leigh stood morosely dumb. Edna was silent and indignant. Nearly five minutes sped.

"What shall I say?" demanded Leigh, angrily.

"Say—where is my wife?"

"Where is my wife? if you will have it."

"She is with Adam Moreland's sister, in Derbyshire."

"Let her come home then, until I inquire into her conduct. Who knows what it has been?"

"I know, said Edna, sternly. "I can trace every hour of her disappearance. Her conduct has been that of a poor, lonely, heart-sick, grieved, disappointed, neglected little wife, whose husband has ignored his promise to love and cherish her. You must do better, Norman."

A mad thought seized Leigh that he could make Violet's flight an excuse for a divorce, and once free, he could cast himself at the feet of Edna.

"I am not to be deceived," he said. "The honor of the Leighs is at stake; I will defend it."

"And I will defend your wife!" cried Edna, with wrath. "If you continue your neglect and unkindness to her, the world shall know it. Norman Leigh, I take your wife for my sister; her cause is mine; she will have a friend in me, and a friend neither weak nor afraid."

"Oh, Edna! Edna!" cried Leigh, frantically; "in calm you are a creature seraphic, in wrath you are magnificent!"

"Hush!" said Edna; "we are not speaking of *me*, but of *Violet*. Norman, come here and sit by me in this window, while I talk to you. You are showing yourself a man far other than I hoped. You are losing all my respect and my kindness. Will you not come back to your better self? Will you not show a tender and noble manhood? Will you not be worthy of your race?"

"What do you wish me to do?" said Leigh, doggedly; but seizing the opportunity to sit by her side, and hear her words, deeming them music, even while they condemned him.

"I wish you first to hear your wife's story," said Edna. She had no idea of telling what little she knew or guessed of the early love of Keith and Violet; that was sacred to themselves; but she tried to explain to Leigh Violet's feelings, her disposition—warm, tender, jealous, self-distrustful, suspicious, sensitive, easily forgiving, while easily offended, inexperienced, sweet, innocent, child-like—a creature to cherish, encourage, protect.

She told how Helen Hope had pursued her and beguiled her.

"Then it is her own fault," said Leigh, hotly. "I told her in Paris that she must avoid that woman. If she had obeyed me, she would have been safe."

"Yes; but on your part, you should have told her more. You destroyed the power of your prohibition when you pretended that Helen Hope was a stranger. You are yourself largely to blame for her further influence."

"But what am I to do with a wife who deceives and disobeys me?" cried Leigh, furiously.

"She never meant to deceive you. And you may be sure that, in future, she will strive her best to please you. She has tried, but have you encouraged her by any response, Norman?"

"No, I have not. I am compelled to tell the truth when you say 'Norman' in that way, Edna."

"Well, then, be now all that you ought to be to her."

Leigh saw that Edna was resolute. If Violet came back, he might further entangle her in some wild action or admission. He looked down, and said, sulkily:

"Then let her come back to her home, if she wishes, and I will inquire into the matter later."

"That is not enough," said Edna, with engaging sweetness, laying her fair hand on his arm. "You will go at once to bring her back; go to be kind, consoling, good; and merely accept what she explains, and give her no further trouble about what is already an unutterable pain."

"I'll never do it in the world!" cried Leigh, hotly. I vow——"

But Edna laid her slender fingers upon his lips.

"Vow nothing. Hush!—hear me, Norman. Good and happy days are in store for you and Violet. She is to have a little child, Norman. Think how happy you will both be then. Think how you have wished for an heir of Leigh! And now, in all your treatment of your wife, will you do one thing, speak one word, that will injure the child you hope for, or one day cause it shame or sorrow?" and Edna turned away, her face mantled with lovely blushes.

Leigh sprang to his feet. He had longed much for a son. Was it possible that Leigh should have an heir? He demanded:

"Edna, what do you say? Is this true? And still she dared go away?"

"She did not know—not until she reached Magery Rogers, Adam's sister—and now Violet is so grieved and penitent for her hastiness. Say, Norman." She rose,

looked him earnestly in the face, and took his hand. "Say you will go there and bring her home; say you will be kind, and utter no reproaches, for her sake, for my sake, for your child's sake; hear my prayer, Norman."

Lord Leigh, in his stubbornness, hesitated for a moment. But the lovely eyes, the illumined face, the ardent words of this charming girl, were wont to raise those who saw her to their best possibilities, and so it was with Norman Leigh. He felt a new manhood rise within him. Charity, grace, nearly a stranger to his soul, entered into his selfish heart; an interest in Violet, such as he had never before felt, took possession of him; and his pride and some movings of parental feeling stirred toward his future heir.

"It is enough, Edna," he said. "I will go. You have conquered. I promise you to be all that you demand. You shall be satisfied with me."

"Oh, Norman!" cried Edna, happy tears rising to her matchless blue eyes. "I knew you would be a good man."

"It is you, angel of my life, who mold me into goodness," he said, looking at her intently.

And then a black and terrible thought rose in his soul, that he might win Edna by kindness to Violet; that he might obliterate the past, secure her esteem and regard, and—Violet was but a frail young creature, after all—if it should be that a life was paid for a life; and that when an heir of Leigh came to the home of his father's, Violet should fade from her sad honors as countess, he might be free to win Edna. Perhaps fate was making a way for him to achieve his great desire.

CHAPTER XLII.

DAME MAGERY'S LODGER.

Monday morning, and Dame Magery was in her garden gathering a bouquet of golden and maroon nasturtiums, and blue larkspur, for Lady Leigh's breakfast-table, when the latch of her little gate clicked, and turning she saw the Lord of Leigh. The old woman turned to him, and in her warm fealty to his race, seized and kissed his hand, saying:

"My lord, my dear lord, welcome!"

"I think you have a little astray countess here, Magery?"

"She's within," said Magery, in a low voice.

Violet, hoping almost against hope, buoyed up by Edna's confident promises, had insisted upon rising early, and she was already sitting by the window, and arrayed in a pink cashmere morning-robe.

As her husband's step crossed the humble threshold, she rose and beseechingly held out her slender white hands. Sweet enough she was, her pleading brown eyes full of tears, the flushes flying swiftly over her artless, child-like face, the dark rings of her shining hair ruffled about her brow. She held her breath; she did not stir; she could not speak.

Norman was moved in spite of himself by this young, gentle, much-wronged creature, who, by the most venial fault, was yet put in the position of a criminal. He held out both hands and took hers in a kind clasp.

"I am glad to find you safe and sound, child. Now you will come home with me?"

"Oh, Norman! May I?"

"Yes, certainly! What are you shaking so for, child? Sit down again. Home as soon as you like, of course."

And stooping as he placed her in a chair, he kissed her forehead.

"But, Norman, you will feel so embarrassed and ashamed of me that I ran away, and how to explain."

"Nonsense! Of course, it was the silliest performance in the world, but no one knows of it. It is a dead secret, except to us two, Keith, Edna, and the two servants. Every one thinks you taking a rest in Sussex. We'll go home and appear at a ball or two. And mind, you say you have had a lovely rest, and feel quite fresh."

"I will indeed, Norman. I feel better, and rested, truly. Oh, how good you are! I will try not to trouble you again."

"I hope you will, I am sure. Such a thing is a hideous bore; but, however, we'll say no more about it. Eh, Kate, that you? Turned cook, and butler, and all? I'm glad to see breakfast, and to find your lady looking so well. We'll start home this evening if Lady Leigh feels able to travel. You're not to hurt yourself, Violet, mind that. Your health is very important now, you know."

Leigh thought he was behaving very well.

Violet, in her deep humility and patience, had no fault to find with him. Perhaps Keith and Edna would have

made large discount on his speeches, but happily no one heard them but Kate, and she was too wise to speak, or even look any condemnation."

"Edna told you?" faltered Violet."

"Yes, she did. Jove! It is the best news I've heard for a year. We'll go back to London to-day, appear in public for a few times, or two or three weeks, and then we had better go down to the Towers. That will be the best place for you, Violet. You can take some quiet friends along with you—you won't object to Miss Ambrose this year, I suppose?"

"Indeed no, Norman. I am so ashamed I ever was so silly. She is the dearest, loveliest, best. I am never so happy as when I am with her."

"That's what I think," groaned the unhappy man to himself; and, giving Violet his hand, he led her to the breakfast-table.

They were alone. Dame Magery had gone to the little paddock where her pet cow was grazing. Kate was buttering toast in the kitchen. Lord Leigh was wholly intent on serving an omelette placed before him, when a swift step crossed the room, and some one noisily dropped into a chair opposite the earl.

Leigh looked up, and saw before him, only the table between, the face which last he had seen framed against the red sunset in the open casement of "The Earl's Folly"—the face over which he thought the waters of the Black Pool had closed forever—the face that had haunted him as his victim, but now leered at him as his enemy.

In his intense amazement he leaped to his feet, but Violet flung herself in his arms, crying:

"Norman! Save me from that terrible man!"

At the same instant Dame Magery rushed in.

"See my head!" began the man, jerking off his cap; but Dame Magery checked him by grasping his arm, saying:

"Out on you! Can I never keep you where you belong?" and led him away unresisting.

"There, there, child—no one will hurt you," said Leigh, releasing himself from Violet's clasp. "Some half-wit of the neighborhood. You will not be harmed."

"But I saw him before! I was lying alone; he came in and said he would kill me! Magery tried to make me think I had been dreaming. She said no one was here."

"Well, since it is some neighbor man, I don't see but she said true enough. There, be calm or you will hurt yourself. Drink your tea at once. You see, Violet, what comes of recklessly leaving your home. A woman is safe under her husband's roof, and there she should stay unless he takes her elsewhere."

"I know it, Norman," said Violet, humble and penitent.

But when breakfast was ended Lord Leigh said he would have a cigar in the garden, and went out to Magery, who was weeding her lettuce.

"Magery, who is that crazy creature?"

"Indeed, my lord, I don't know."

"Where did he come from? How came he here?"

"Well, my lord, it's no harm to tell you, though I did insist to my lady he was a dream. Adam brought him here."

"Adam, my valet! And what did he say about him?"

"My lord, the man was sick and raving, from a great cut all along the side of his head. It knocked him clean crazy, and he's been crazy ever since. Adam said I was such a good nurse he brought him to me. He was a friend of his who had got into trouble, and he did not want to have him investigated, going to an asylum. So Adam pays me for keeping him, and I have him safe in that strong, comfortable room off the kitchen. Only lately he has got out twice, and I cannot see how he does it."

"Had he no luggage, no papers?"

"No, my lord, only a few new things I think Adam had bought in London for him."

"And when did he come here?"

"The last day of November, my lord."

"I think if he does not improve, Adam must take him to Scotland to a good asylum. I fear for your safety, Magery."

"Thank you, my lord."

On the third day after this, Mrs. Ainslie said to her governess at luncheon:

"Miss Hope, my niece, the countess, has come home. I called on her this morning. She has had a trip to the Towers, and is looking as fresh as a rose, and Leigh is so pleased and proud you cannot think. There is to be an heir there before the year is out—a future earl, Heaven

send—and, by the way, the countess wants to see you to-morrow at ten. Don't forget."

After this thunderbolt of news, Helen Hope neither ate nor slept, and was in a fury of rage and despair. She found Violet alone next morning, lying on the couch in the boudoir. A new dignity, a serenity, a self-poise, a certain strength of womanhood had come to the little countess through her late experiences.

"Miss Hope," she said, quietly, "you have acted to me a wicked, very wicked part, but my trouble is much of my own making in seeing you when I was warned against you, and in listening to your crafty tales. You urged me to do a thing which you knew was wicked, and which you hoped would be fatal to me. You promised to meet me when you never meant to do so, and you sent me to seek a place which did not exist. God has taken care of me. God guarded all my foolish way, and sent me friends and safety. You need never see me again, for I have done with you; and as I know you are not a fit guide for my cousins, you must leave my aunt. If you will give warning, and leave at once, I will help soothe her vexation, and will not say a word against you. If you will not go, I shall tell her enough to secure your dismissal."

"And then I will *ruin you*, my fine countess."

"At all risk, my cousins shall be saved. Anna was here yesterday, and I find you have advised her to elope with Gore."

"And you consider it a decent act to turn me helpless into the street!" screamed Helen, wildly.

"No. Here are one hundred pounds. Pray go and find a place in France, or where I will not know where you are. Don't hesitate. Take the money. You are welcome. Try and be good."

"Try and be good!" cried Helen, rising in wrath. "Listen—I will bring you to ruin and shame! I will beggar that child which you are so proudly expecting! I will show the world that Norman Leigh is a villain and an impostor, far down on the level of Helen Hope, the foundling. I will show that you are no true wife, only a befooled sham countess, of a sham Lord of Leigh, and——"

The door opened, and Edna entered, noble and queenly.

"Silence, Helen Hope! These are idle threats, wicked falsehoods. Leave Lady Leigh's presence instantly."

"You think I cannot do it? Recall what his mother was, and think if it might not be shown that he is no lawful Lord of Leigh. Recall what he has been, and say if I am not likely, when I dedicate my life to vengeance, to find a wife of his, married before *she* stood at the altar in St. George's."

"Edna! Edna! what is she saying?" screamed Violet.

"Nothing that she can prove—nothing true, my darling."

"I will prove it!" cried Helen Hope, and dashed away.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"BUT WHY DID YOU FOLLOW ME?"

The morning after his return from Derbyshire, Lord Leigh summoned Adam to his private room. He stood in the window, looking upon the Green Park, and did not turn when his valet came in, and said:

"Yes, my lord."

"Adam, I tell you, in strict confidence, that your lady was in Derby, with your sister Magery, and I have been there to bring her home."

"Yes, my lord," said Adam, in a low tone.

"And while there I saw an insane person, whom your sister has in charge."

"Oh, did you see him, my lord?" cried Adam, startled. Lord Leigh wheeled about.

"Adam, how did that man come into your keeping?"

"I dragged him out of the Black Pool, my lord."

Leigh made a step toward his valet.

"You did, and you concealed it! Adam, do you know that day and night, for six months, I have believed that man moldering, a hideous corpse, in the bottom of the Black Pool!"

"Master, master! It was not you! You never tried to kill him!" cried Adam, shuddering back, and turning a pallid face on Lord Leigh.

"No, Adam, surely I did not. He came to me in 'The Earl's Folly,' and was standing in the open window, when suddenly he went backward and disappeared. I was springing toward him to wrest a paper from him, but I swear to

you I had not touched him. I did my best to get out and rescue him, but the door was fast, and when I got out, there was no trace. Now, Adam, what was your part in that?"

"My lord, when I see you going alone to "The Folly" day after day, I am so uneasy I cannot rest. It is not the place for you, brooding alone, and I am fearing you will do yourself an injury; and, forgive me, my lord, I follow you, and hang about the place till you leave it safely. And that day, my lord, as I am oldish, and had slept ill the night before, I dropped asleep, lying under some alder bushes near "The Folly," and I had just awaked, dazed like, when a man fell from the upper window, and went down in the pool, and did not come up or struggle, but went down as a man dead when he fell; and, my lord, I thought it was you. So I off with my coat and shoes, and plunged in, and I brought the man out, diving down where he went. I was a rare one always in the water, and I saw it was a stranger, and he seemed dead, and the side of his head lay open. There is an archway under one corner of "The Folly," sir, you know, and I laid him in there on some leaves, and fled to my room, and got brandy, and salts, and plaster, and some old handkerchiefs. I hurried and went the short way—not by the path. When I got back, "The Folly" was open and still, and I laid my man on the lounge there, and nursed him that night. In the morning I took him to Widow Green's little cottage. She's a deaf mute, you know, and we had him there part of a week, and then I took him to Magery, as his head was healing, and he out of his senses."

"And you did not connect me with it, Adam?"

"Well, my lord, I think the hurt on his head was got by striking a stone as he fell, and I think he fell in an epileptic fit; and I *did* think of you at first, until I made sure you were not in "The Folly," but had left while I slept."

"How did you make sure of that?"

"I found Miss Hope in the wood, and she told me you had ridden by nearly an hour before, my lord."

"Adam, who was that man?"

"There was a name on his linen, my lord—Bart Kemp."

"And he had papers in his hands?"

"Not a paper, my lord."

"Did you ever hear that name before?"

Adam looked down uneasily.

"Answer me, Adam. This is a time for frankness."

"My lord, it was the name of your mother's first husband, an Irish attorney."

Lord Leigh gasped.

"Then who is this man?"

"His son, sir, I think, by a first marriage. He had a son of his name, and the boy, I heard, had epileptic fits occasionally."

"Adam, you were a witness of my father's marriage? The date?"

"The seventeenth of June, 1842, my lord."

"And my birth was——"

"The tenth of June, 1843, master, as registered."

"Why do you suppose this man came to look for me?"

"To get influence or money, on threat of mentioning that he was the late Lady Leigh's step-son. He knew you would be ashamed of him, my lord. But I think the poor fellow will trouble you no more—he is mad. I hid him with my sister, to keep a talk about your family from spreading, my lord."

Lord Leigh paced the room.

"Adam, I thank you; you are faithful. I have now, more than ever, reason to wish to know that all is right in regard to me and my estates. If there is one thing I cherish, it is my title, my Leigh blood. And now, Adam, I am glad to tell you that I hope my earldom is to have an heir, of my own line, and Colonel Hartington's boast may cease——"

"Oh, my lord! my lord!" cried Adam, with emotion, dropping on his knees and kissing his master's hand, "surely I wish you joy, and may God be good to you, and to yours to the latest generation. Oh, now, my dear master, you will cease being moody and unhappy, and you will need no excitement, but will find your happiness, as your father did, in building up the estate for your heir."

"Thank you, Adam," said Leigh, much touched by this devotion. "I will do the best I can, though I feel a curse is on me. My blood, Adam, is not all Leigh."

"And this man Kemp shall stay where he is?"

"I think, Adam, that in a fortnight or so, when it is not likely that Magery will connect the change with me, I

will arrange to have you take him to a private asylum in Scotland."

Now, indeed, Leigh breathed more freely. The terror of a crime was lifted from his spirit. The wish of his heart was gratified, when he could tell Colonel Hartington his hope of an heir.

And Edna had yielded to Violet's entreaties, and would accompany Lady Burton for a fortnight's visit at Leigh Towers. But, after she left the Towers she would be constantly in the society of Keith and Alwood. To see her was to love her, and, no doubt, ere long Edna would be the wife of some happier man.

These thoughts so goaded him that while Edna was at the Towers they unhappily found expression. A number of guests were at the Towers during July, and Edna had chosen that time for her visit, hoping to find safety in numbers. She would not have gone at all, only Violet begged so piteously that she could not refuse, and very happy Violet was for that two weeks.

It was on a lovely moonlight evening that Edna, seeing all the circle in the drawing-room well engaged, stepped from the long window upon the terrace, and strolled from the house.

Unhappily Leigh, whose furtive gaze followed her continuously, had seen her graceful figure steal from behind the silken hangings. He was playing chess with Gore, and though far the better player, suddenly in two moves allowed himself to be checkmated.

"What has come to you?" cried Gore, laughing.

"Simply charity. I saw Anna alone in a favorable nook behind the piano, and I thought it a benign time for you to go and do a little courting, I shall steal out and have a solitary cigar."

He made good his escape, followed Edna by some swift instinct, and she started, as in the moonlight, in music and perfume, he came to her and touched her hand.

"Edna!"

"Oh, Lord Leigh, why are you away from your guests?"

"Because one guest, *the* guest is here."

"But why did you follow me?" she said, turning coldly.

"Do you wish—would you prefer it had been another?" cried Leigh, in jealous pain.

"I certainly prefer to be alone. Since you have come, will you take me back to the drawing-room?"

She turned her steps toward the house, but he stayed her.

"One moment. Will you not prolong your visit? Violet wishes it very much. I wish it. You are a great help and comfort to us. I am never so happy, so able to be my best, as when you are here. Will you not stay after Lady Burton goes?"

"You are kind; but, really, it is impossible."

"Don't say so—don't think so. Stay. My hope, my happiness, my safety depend on it. You must stay."

"I really cannot, Lord Leigh," said Edna, striving to move on, but he held her fast.

"Do you wish to go? Do you prefer to go?"

"Yes. I have made pleasing engagements. I wish to fulfill them. Do not detain me in this way, please, Lord Leigh."

"You cannot go. You shall not go. You drive me mad. You will go to the castle, and Keith and Alwood, and dozens more, will be sunned by your eyes, blessed by your smile, sighing at your feet. By Heaven, Edna, every time I look at you, I curse myself for a fool that when you might have been mine, I let you go!"

His voice alarmed her, but she said, firmly:

"Enough of that, Lord Leigh."

"No, no, it is not enough; I must speak—I will. Edna, promise me that you will not marry one of them."

"I shall make no such extraordinary promise."

"You must, you shall! Oh, say you will not love or marry; it would drive me wild!"

"This is sheer raving. If it continues I leave your house to-morrow. Let go my hand, Lord Leigh."

"Promise, that for five years, for three years, you will not marry!"

"You must be insane to ask such a thing. What difference could it possibly make to you?"

"Why, none; yes, all—every difference. To know that you loved, to hear of your marriage, would drive me to suicide. Oh, give me room for hope, my Edna."

"Room for hope! What do you mean?" cried Edna in terror, starting from him.

But he fell at her feet; he clasped her with his arms; he held her fast.

"Edna, who knows what may happen? I might one day be free! And then—oh, then, if you had not shut the door of hope to me, your love might make me good and happy as angels are. Oh, wait—wait—until I know what time will bring forth to me."

"Wretch!" cried Edna, in excess of horror, "is it possible that you are building on the death of that lovely, guileless, blessed little darling, the mother of your child? Release me, sir! My very soul is sick at such an enormity!"

"Oh, Edna, cannot you be merciful? can you not see that despair, remorse, jealous pain have made me mad?"

"I should say you were fit only for a lunatic asylum, Lord Leigh, if you can utter such thoughts to me! I came here only to satisfy your wife. I hoped that, as God was giving you the desire of your heart, mere gratitude would make a man, a gentleman, of you; and I never dreamed that in one word you could so insult both me and your wife. Listen to me, Norman Leigh! Never, never, were we both free as air, would I be yours. I would die a thousand deaths rather!"

"Did you not once love me?"

"No, a thousand times no! A dreaming girl, I loved an ideal. Not as you were, are, or can ever be!"

"Could you never learn to love me, Edna?"

"No; never! *never!* NEVER!"

"One word! Do you, Edna, do you love another?"

"Yes, yes—I do!"

"Then, *go.*"

Edna gathered up her shimmering skirts in her little ungloved hand, and fled along the flower-edged walk toward the lighted drawing-room. She was indignant with Leigh, but doubly indignant with herself for trusting either his penitence or his honor so far as to come under his roof. She was resolved to see him no more. She would not appear at breakfast. She would leave the house before any one of the family rose. She would explain as far as she must to Lady Burton, and leave a letter for Violet. It would be easy to give as an excuse sudden need of going to one of her Haviland relations.

With Edna to plan was to execute. She gave quiet orders to her maid, who packed her boxes, while Edna herself went to Lady Burton.

"You will excuse me to Violet; cover my retreat," she

said; "stay and console her for a little; but I must go. When you go to Keith Castle, if you desire my company, as you have said, write me at my cousin's."

"Must you really go, my dear? Has something so serious happened that you cannot stay?" said Lady Burton.

"It is only this, Lady Burton, that I should never have come here. Lord Leigh cannot forget his early folly, his infatuation. Do you know, I sometimes think he is not master of himself—that he hardly knows what he is saying or doing! However, I cannot stay to hear protestations of love from the husband of my friend and hostess; and I shall try never to meet Lord Leigh again."

"I will go to the housekeeper's room, and ask that a carriage be ready early to take you to the station. And you will join me when I leave here, and go to the castle with me."

"Thank you, yes, dear Lady Burton."

"Edna, have you nothing else to tell me? Remember, I try and stand as a mother to you."

"Is it—about the Marquis of Alwood?" said Edna, looking down, and flushing "celestial rosy red, love's proper hue."

"Yes," said Lady Burton, with a secret sigh.

"He did—ask me—to be his wife, Lady Burton."

"And you accepted him?"

"No," said Edna, softly.

"Why, my child? Do you not love him?—do you love another?"

"I love no other, Lady Burton. I do love him," said Edna, sinking on her knees, and hiding her face on Lady Burton's arm. "Now, at last, I think I know what love really is!"

"And yet rejected him?"

"I did not reject him. Oh, Lady Burton, I remembered that when in my childish foolishness, and ignorance of my own heart, and of what love might be, I thought I loved Lord Leigh, and was ready to be his wife, my dear, wise father made me wait a year of silence and separation, to see if what we felt was love, and would stand the test. And, oh, Lady Burton, how I have blessed him for that wisdom and prudence. You see, again, I have a suitor, socially far above me, one whom the fairest and noblest in the land would be glad to win, and I feel so undeserving of

that love, and that lofty station. And suppose I should accept him, and he should see that he had erred in asking me to be his wife, I resolved to do now, that God has taken my father away, just as he bade me do when he was with me, and I begged Lord Alwood to wait a year, and not think of me, but look for some one better, and nearer his own rank; to take a year, to be sure that I was his true choice."

"And he——"

"Of course he protested he would love me better daily; but there is no engagement, he waits a year."

"I had hoped it would have been my son."

"Dearest lady, your son's heart is once and forever given to Violet. And as he may not love her, love with him is in its grave."

"Poor Kenneth!" sighed the mother.

"And poor Violet!" said the girl.

Before breakfast next day, Violet, her eyes full of tears, and with a note in her hand, went to the library of Leigh.

"Oh, Norman, I am so unhappy. Edna has left us."

"Left us!" cried Leigh, angrily, snatching the note.

He read between the lines, and knew the reason why. His anger would have broken forth, but at that moment Adam, who had been sent to Derbyshire, entered the library, worn and disordered from the hasty journey.

Lord Leigh led Violet to the door, shut it behind her.

"Well, Adam?"

"My lord the man has escaped!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

"THERE IS A CHILD AT THE TOWERS."

The summer sped. The guests were nearly all gone from the Towers. Mrs. Ainslie, with great self-importance, remained. Her own house, children, servants, must get on as best they might; she could not leave her dear niece, the countess. Henry Ainslie came up from London to see his niece; and, after long entreaty, Violet secured from him and her aunt a promise that, if no more brilliant match offered in the ensuing season, Anna might be free to accept Captain Gore.

Lord Leigh, meanwhile, after the departure of Edna with Lady Burton, relapsed into daily deepening gloom. He said no unkind word to Violet; he was polite, inquired after her health, told her to have, and do, and be, just whatever she chose; but he kept his own rooms and the library, or wandering over the estates, and was often absolutely silent during a whole meal.

The thought of the child upheld Violet. There would at last be a love wholly hers, to which she could deliver herself with intense, unselfish devotion. She planned to remain at the Towers, and give up most of the time to the absorbing, blessed duties of a mother.

Mrs. Ainslie had secured a nurse for the heir. She was a stout, elderly looking woman, with a wig of light hair under an ample cap, very dark skin, heavy light brows, and wearing spectacles of a pale gray glass.

"Who is the woman, aunt?" asked Violet, anxiously.

"Mrs. Dawson."

"And who recommended her to you?"

"A friend of mine, a very sensible person. Violet, you should not be so headstrong. You should leave these things to me, as I am a person of large experience."

"But I feel as if some terrible trouble might come to us through the nurse," urged Violet.

"That is all nervousness. This Mrs. Dawson is very competent; and, if anything can counterbalance your folly in insisting on nourishing the child yourself, having her will do it. I shall have her waiting in the village."

"She shall not enter the house till the child is six weeks old, and I am able to superintend her," said the little countess, contumaciously, and went off to comfort herself by sending one hundred pounds each to Dame Magery and to comely Mary Miller, who had solaced her in her wanderings.

* * * * *

There came a warm, ripe, glowing October day, when the earth was steeped in sunshine, and leaf, and blade, and tree gave out rich balsamic odors, when suddenly from the high towers of the church at Leigh broke forth a jubilant ringing of bells. The cottage people crowded to the doors, and smiled and nodded to each other:

"There is a child at the Towers."

Then there was a pause, and the chimes in the Towers

began to ring that old, old strain, "Summer is a comin' in!"—the tune that always welcomed a new-born Lord of Leigh.

"There's a son," said the women, heartily. "God bless the little earl! How proud that sweet young mother will be!"

There came for Violet a season of rest and peace. Her heart overflowed with gratitude, and was exalted with hope, as she looked at her beautiful little son. In the infant, Rupert, the errors and neglects of his father were forgotten, or lost their power to wound. The new king of Violet's heart accomplished what she had so long prayed and striven for—the banishment of Keith's absorbing image from her heart. The child lay in his cradle of rose satin and white lace, and Violet feasted her loving eyes on her treasure; as the infant, pink and dimpled, slept in her tender arms, and her dainty face hourly regained a peaceful, happy look, as her wounded heart found at last its deep consolation.

Leigh was delighted with his heir, and appeared to love the child fondly. At first the babe seemed likely to draw the parents more closely together, but love of pleasure and his evil disposition had too long held empire in Leigh's soul to be easily driven out; and, having had the triumph of summoning Lady Clare and Colonel Hartington to the magnificent christening feast, exhibiting the child to the admiring tenantry, and receiving the congratulations of his friends and neighbors, Lord Leigh contented himself with the knowledge that he had a promising son and heir, and relapsed into his moody and restless condition, going often up to London for a week or weeks, when Violet dared not think what he might be about, and hourly trembled lest there should come bad news from him; and old Adam looked at the future Earl of Leigh, and felt sure his father was risking his inheritance at the gaming table.

It was a mid-February night, and the little countess could not sleep. The babe was in deep slumber. Violet finally rose, put on her dressing-gown and slippers, and wandered out into the dimly lighted corridor. She walked up and down once or twice, with swift, soundless step, then gazed down the great carved oak staircase into the hall.

Violet, led by some fascination of half terror, glided like a little white ghost, in her trailing robe of snowy cashmere, and moved along the gloomy lower hall, so famous

for its carvings and its antique treasures. The library door opened from the darkest part of this hall, and suddenly Violet realized that across the floor of the library lay a band of livid light. She had always supposed herself timid, but at this sight she grew singularly calm, and neither fled nor screamed, but gently stole toward the library. Were there robbers in the house? There was a bell-pull near the library, that of the largest bell in the building, she remembered that.

Since the birth of her child, all Violet's best nature had developed itself. She had grown in force of character, in dignity, and self-reliance. Becoming a mother, she had become, in a fine, noble sense, a woman. So now she thought only that some danger menaced the house—the house that sheltered her child—and she went quietly toward the bar of light.

Standing in the door-way, she saw that the light fell from the door of a large, square, inner closet, which she had but once or twice seen opened, but which contained, in drawers and on shelves, the private papers of the house of Leigh for many generations—letters, copies, journals, all filed—and each receptacle labeled and dated. She thought of this in a flash, as she saw the light streaming redly in the library from the door of this closet, which stood less than half open. Also in a flash it occurred to her that ordinary robbers would be at the plate closet, or at the great safe.

Straight to the invaded closet silently moved the slender, girl-like form in white, with the silken masses of brown hair falling over her shoulders.

A lamp with a double burner stood upon a shelf. A drawer, marked "'40—'50," was near the lamp, and was open.

Beside it, intent on running over a bundle of papers held in her hand, was the head nurse.

Yet, was it the nurse? Violet knew the long, striped flannel wrapper, and the soft, shapely hands of the nurse; yet, what strange change had passed over her? Cap, light wig, gray glasses, were gone; so were the thick, light brows; the skin seemed no longer thick and faded, but was smooth olive; the shoulders were well carried. In a word, this midnight searcher into family secrets; this felon, whose false keys, in black betrayal, lay beside the lamp, brought from the lips of the horrified Violet the cry:

"*Helen Hope!*"

Helen dropped the letters, wheeled about, faced Violet.

"Move or speak, and you die!"

She had a small, shining pistol in her hand.

As by an illumination Violet remembered that the heavy door of the closet had no handle on the inside.

With a sudden, desperate motion, she shut the door.

The closing of the door left Violet in utter darkness. She had by her swift motion taken her life in her hands, and could hardly realize that she was safe, and Helen was a prisoner in the strong closet. Either her motion to the easily moving door had been too quick and vigorous, or Helen had not been able to resolve to fire upon her. She had made her a prisoner; what should she do with her?"

Leigh was in London. Instinctively Violet desired to avoid publicity. She stood, cold and trembling, for a few minutes, and then, regaining self-control, went up to the servants' gallery, and tapped at Adam Moreland's door.

The old man was wakeful, and he was in his dressing-gown and beside her in the hall in an instant.

"Dear lady, what is it?"

"Adam, did you ever see a woman named Helen Hope?"

"Yes; I know of her, my lady."

"She is Lord Leigh's enemy, is she not?"

"I fear she has much cause. She is a dangerous woman."

"Adam, she has been here in disguise, as Mrs. Dawson."

"Oh, my lady! has she poisoned the child?"

"Hush, Adam! your little lord is safe; so am I."

Then she briefly told the story of her midnight fright, and of her prisoner.

"My lady, be sure she was looking among my late lord's papers for something to injure Lord Leigh. I make no doubt she has, for revenge, gone over to Colonel Hartington's party, to try and harm my lord and his son. She has come for that. She had the keys."

"I saw a small bunch of bight new keys by her."

"Well, my lady, we must get her out, and search her for papers. She must get none away. Then what?"

"I can tell you better after that. Come with me, Adam."

Violet returned to the library, and called, through the closed door:

"Helen! I am here, with Adam Moreland, and you are my prisoner."

"Understand," said Helen, in a clear voice, "if you open the door, to give me up for a felony, I shall put this bullet through my heart when you touch the handle of the door."

"Adam," said Violet, "I cannot have this woman's death on my hands. Remember, she has been wronged."

"Will you promise not to harm yourself, if we agree to let you go, Helen?" she asked, through the door.

"Yes."

"You will put that weapon in the drawer and shut the drawer before we open this door—on your oath?"

"Yes, on my oath."

"But you must be searched for papers, Helen, and take your oath, that you have no papers, and no copies."

Helen was silent.

"Consider, if you refuse, I am compelled to send for the officers, and give you your choice between arrest for a felony, or death by your own hand, if you insist upon preferring it."

"I promise," said Helen. "There are no papers that I care for. I did not find what I wanted."

"Can I trust you to keep your word?" asked Violet.

"Yes. If I don't, Adam is there, and he is strong."

"Now, then, I open the door."

Violet opened the door, and she and Helen stood facing each other.

"Victory is yours, Lady Leigh," said Helen, scornfully.

"Helen, I have never been unkind to you; why are you my enemy?" said Violet, earnestly.

"You are *his wife*."

Violet sighed.

"Your husband has deceived, wronged, mocked, scorned me," said Helen, hotly, "and you know the words, 'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.'"

Violet could not prevent the rising of a heavenly pity in her innocent heart as she looked at the pale, contorted, and passionate face before her; she herself knew so well the pain of wounded love.

"Helen," she said, gently, "to be wronged and scorned need not make one wicked."

"It makes *me* wicked. What have I left in the world."

True, Helen had no sweet little one to be her comfort.

"Helen, I know you have been wronged; from my soul I pity you. But now you know none of us can right this wrong. It is too late. I pray you, Helen, lay aside passion and revenge, and forgive my husband."

"Never! till I die—till we both die!" cried Helen.

"I remember," said Violet, urging her gentle plea, "that you said you hated me, and would bring woe on me, my husband, and my child. For that end I know you have come here. Did you deceive my aunt, Helen? She did not know?"

"No," said Helen, with a hard laugh. "I merely recommended to her a nurse of my acquaintance."

"You deceived me. I did not know you."

Again the hard laugh.

"A man in Paris, whose trade it is to aid rogues, made me up in this way, for the sum of six pounds. But I so hated the spoiling of my beauty, that I took liberty at night to be myself."

"Did you come here just to seek papers that you hoped would harm Lord Leigh."

"I can hardly tell what I wanted," burst forth Helen. "Yes, I wanted to search for papers, when I picked up from servants' gossip where things were kept. But I wanted to be near *him*—to watch him—to hear his voice. Oh, strange infatuation for him that I scorned myself for, and cannot conquer! I thought, perhaps, I might find evidence to put him in my power, and perhaps then I might have been tempted by Satan to kill you or the child. Who knows? Such things happen, and human beings have become demons. Oh, where did I get this cruel, fierce, hideous volcano heart? And you and Edna are so different; like angels in comparison with me."

She flung herself on the floor, and wept and sobbed, bringing tears to the eyes of the countess and Adam. What a pitiful, perverted, stormy soul this was! Violet knelt by her and touched her hand.

"Helen, do let me help and save you. If you tell me truly that you have taken no papers belonging to Lord Leigh, all this shall be as if it had not been. You shall

leave here at once. Adam shall get out a carriage, and take you to the station to catch the four o'clock morning train. He will go with you to London, and buy you a ticket to Boulogne. I will give you a hundred pounds, so you will not want until you find employment. Oh, do go away, and try and be better! Do not hate me and my little child—nor injure Leigh."

"Why pray for Leigh? He does not love you."

"I know he does not," said Violet, meekly, "but he is my husband, and my child's father."

"And why should I go, and leave you to enjoy everything?" cried Helen, fiercely.

"I enjoy? Oh, Helen, I, too, suffer! My heart is broken! but I am trying to be good."

Some better spirit moved, for the moment, the wild, turbulent nature of this woman. She checked her moaning sobs, sat up, and kissed Violet's hand.

"Yes, I will go. You have your sorrow, and you bear it like an angel, and I bear mine like a fiend. Adam, take me away!"

Adam took the lamp, and the three went up to the room which had been occupied by Helen, under the name of Mrs. Dawson.

"Is it safe for me to leave my lady with you while I get a chaise?" said Adam.

"Yes, now it is safe. The demon has for the hour gone out of me. I don't know as if I ever would have come to the point of hurting her or her child personally.

For Violet, she seemed to have no fear of Helen. She waited while she packed her one moderate trunk, and went down to the rear door with them, when Adam carried the box down on his shoulder, and drove away with Helen.

He took her to London, and saw her start in the Boulogne boat. Then he went to seek his lord. He must go home to know what had happened, and look over his papers.

It was in the library, in Adam's presence, that Violet told her husband, simply and earnestly, the history of that night. Adam's eyes filled with tears as he remembered where he had found her husband, when he looked for him—at the gaming-table.

"I do not know as I did right," said Violet, "but I could

not give the poor creature in charge, and I thought you would not like a public scandal."

"You did quite right," said Leigh. "For the time she has gone; but, Violet, I know that woman will bring on us, on our boy, some fatal trouble."

"And if it must be so, Norman," said Violet, gently, "how better can we meet trouble than by trying to do our best, and help each other?"

Leigh was overcome. He sank on his knees, and clasped and kissed her hands.

"Oh, Violet, good, kind little Violet, I am unworthy of you! I, in my sins, am always destroying our home, while you, brave and gently, are trying to defend it."

CHAPTER XLV.

"THAT ENDS ALL BETWEEN US."

For a little time the vagrant heart of Leigh seemed to turn to Violet with gratitude, almost with love. He spoke kindly to her, had some thoughtful care for her comfort.

"You wanted Magery Rogers for the boy's nurse," he said, "and you shall have her. Adam shall go and bring her here. You shall not be frightened again by a stranger."

He sent Adam for Magery, telling him to bid her be silent about her insane lodger, Bart Kemp.

In a few days Magery had returned to the scene of her childhood, and the nursery where she had been little maid to the late lord's sister. Her passionate devotion to Violet and her child knew no bounds.

"My lord," said Adam, seeking a private conference, the day after his return, "while gone, I saw an advertisement asking news of Bart Kemp, and describing our man exactly. I went to the address given, and I found a little gray, shrewd lawyer. He told me what the man was like, even to the big plaid suit, which is up in my closet now, for I put other things on him when I took him away. He told me, my lord, that Kemp had been over twenty years in Australia, and had made money, and that he had funds and papers belonging to him in his office. He says Kemp is rather rich, and was with him the middle of November,

"THESE WORDS ARE AN INSULT TO ME! LEAVE ME,
AND NEVER VENTURE INTO MY PRESENCE AGAIN!"



"DIE! WITCH, DIE!"



and said he was going to Sussex to hunt up a relative who was 'high quality.'"

"How much did you tell the lawyer, Adam?"

"I told him Kemp went to Sussex, and I being out in a wood, one day, saw him fall, as in epilepsy, and he struck his head, and I did what I could for him, and, as he was out of his mind, I took him to my sister, to be cared for till he recovered, and that some months ago he escaped. I gave him my references and my sister's, and I told him it was done out of kindness—and so it was—to you."

"Well, what will he do about it?" asked Leigh, eagerly.

"He says he must advertise for his man, and if that does not succeed, he must set the police to search for him."

Lord Leigh felt that some attack was likely to be made on his birth and title. What it could be, he did not know, as he felt firmly established concerning both; but there was his tenderest point, and there he believed that Helen's vengeance would wound him. He would need friends and helpers in such an emergency, and he sought to consolidate friendships with such men as Sir Tom Churchill, Lord Keith, and the Marquis of Alwood. If an attack were made on his title, it must be tried before his peers.

He concluded that it would be well for Violet to renounce her resolution of withdrawing entirely from society and remaining in Sussex during all the season. She would come to town with the child for at least a month.

If he had Violet in London they must attend and give entertainments, which would at least bring him where he could see Edna, if even it was far off, and the joy of seeing her was dashed with the pain of watching others worshipping at her shrine, or beholding a favored suitor by her side.

Violet dreaded to go to London; her country home was so safe, quiet, and happy for her and for her child. But Leigh insisted; and when the primroses were all abloom, she went back to her Belgravian residence.

The morning after her arrival she drove to Lady Burton's, taking Magery and the little Rupert, desirous of showing the darling to the two friends whom she most valued. Her coming was as a festival. Mother and babe were overwhelmed with caresses and praises. Edna carried the infant up to Lady Burton's boudoir, and Lady Burton came up, clasping her arm around Violet's waist.

"You must have off your wraps and stay to lunch," said Lady Burton. "We are alone. Kenneth has been at the castle this week past, overseeing plans for new school-houses. We have an undisturbed day before us. I will give orders to admit no one. Tell us all your new joys and experiences, my little Violet. How young and sweet you look, with the mother-joy in your shining brown eyes."

"And look at this love of loves," cried Edna, dancing the baby free of the satin and down cloak, and his marvelous French cap. "He is our Violet all over again. See—he has her dimples, and her short upper lip, and her pretty brown rings of hair, and her eyes, all ready to laugh or cry. Oh, the pet!"

And Edna caught the laughing infant to her bosom and smothered him with kisses.

"Dearest Violet," said Lady Burton, tenderly, "I know how to feel for you. Your experience is mine. I know how this child comforts and soothes your heart, and heals its wounds, and sweetens your bitter cup."

"He does, indeed, dear Lady Burton; and I am trying, oh, so hard, to improve, and to be a good, wise mother to him. He is so bright, you cannot think. Let me have him, please, Edna; I want to show you what he can do."

Violet took her child on her arm, and standing, an image of gracious beauty, in the center of the room, said, coaxingly:

"Now, Rupert, kiss your hand for mamma. Only see him!"

She lifted her eyes. Kenneth Keith stood in the doorway.

There was a world of anguish in Kenneth's eyes, as so unexpectedly he faced this woman, whom he devoutly and undyingly loved, and saw her in tenfold beauty and charm, with her child—Leigh's child—in her embrace.

Violet had not seen Kenneth since before her flight—a whole year before. She had sedulously striven to forget him. She had been absorbed in maternal love, and hoped, believed, that for Kenneth love had sobered into calmest friendship. But when she saw him in his noble, manly beauty, that look of deep admiration, and of renouncing agony in his face, a dagger seemed to pierce her heart, and she grew pallid as a wreath of snow.

But the baby Rupert had a decided and ungallant prefer-

ence for his own sex. With a babe's instinct, he saw that Lord Keith was worthy of his infant confidence; so he leaped and crowed in his mother's arms, and held out both his pearly and dimpled hands to the tall, fair Saxon in the door-way.

Then little Violet was true to her growing womanhood, and relieved the situation of its painfulness. She went straight to Kenneth, and, holding out her child, said:

"My boy likes you, Lord Keith. Will you be his friend?"

"Always! Forever!" exclaimed Keith, and the words seemed to him as some sacramental oath. The love that must be rigorously withdrawn from the mother might be safely lavished on the child.

He took Rupert in his clasp, kissed his lovely little face, and, with him in his arms, greeted his mother, and explained his sudden coming. He would only remain to lunch, and return to the castle immediately after.

After lunch, Kenneth and his mother went to the library, to discuss some alterations at Lady Burton's dower house, and Edna took Violet and the babe to her own rooms.

The next morning, when Violet met Lord Leigh at breakfast, she told him of the happy visit she had had the day before.

"And did you make my peace with that offended goddess, Miss Ambrose Haviland?" said Leigh.

"Oh, Norman, I quite forgot; but it is no matter. You are mistaken. She is not at all angry with you. She thinks Rupert perfectly lovely, and she is coming to our ball."

"And will, I suppose, favor us with her wedding-cards?"

"Not this season."

"Isn't she engaged to Alwood?" demanded Leigh.

"Oh, no. She told him he must wait a year for her answer—at least a year to make up his mind—and if he asks again, then she will answer."

"Oh, a whole year! That is a cool affair. When will the year be up? Take another bit of chicken, my dear."

"Oh, thanks," said Violet, flushed at the unusual kindness, as they breakfasted alone. "The year will not be up till August."

"That time will pass quickly," said Leigh, with indifference.

But the indifference was merely outward; his heart was on fire with jealous fury. Oh, to be able to stop that marriage! Oh, to be able to palsy on Alwood's lips that marriage offer! Oh, to keep the girl he loved and could not possess at least unwed! He could not, he would not see her married to another. He felt that if her wedding-day dawned he could not live to see its setting sun.

He saw Edna at assemblies; he took Violet to the opera repeatedly, because Edna would be in the opposite box; he touched her hand in the dance; he rode beside her carriage in the park, and hour by hour his repressed frenzy grew, until it was veritable madness.

Then came the night of Violet's ball, and Edna was there in tenfold beauty, in a dress of palest naiad-green, embroidered with seed pearls. Admitted queen of beauty, he saw her floating through a waltz in the arms of the Marquis of Alwood.

At that sight Satan entered into the heart of Norman, Lord of Leigh. "For love is strong as death and jealousy is cruel as the grave." He felt ready to sacrifice all honor, humanity, manliness, to keep the beautiful and innocent Edna from his rival's arms. Then a most malign, dastardly plan suggested itself to him, and in the whirlwind of his rage he was carried away to accept it.

For a minute the good blood and breeding that had been his, the remnants of manliness, revolted at his vile treachery; but as he hesitated the waltz ended, and the marquis led Edna back to the Lady Burton; but as her hand left his arm, the eyes of the noble young pair met, under the intent gaze of Leigh.

The marquis looked into the blue orbs of Edna, adoration intense, beseeching, and from these lovely eyes an unconscious flame of pure and tender love leaped toward him.

The marquis surely needed no fuller answer to his suit; that look should have told him—did for the minute—that Edna's heart was his.

Leigh read that much, and his madness culminated.

The marquis passed along toward a window, and stood leaning against it, watching the forming of a new set of dancers on the floor. Not far from Alwood Colonel Harrington and Gore were standing.

Leigh went over to them, and whispered to Gore:

"Anna is in the conservatory."

Gore, obedient to the hint, moved away and left to Leigh his place by Hartington. Lord Leigh did not see Alwood, but stood with his back to him, but certain that he was in full hearing.

"A splendid assemblage of fair women and brave men, cousin," said Leigh to the colonel. "In such a gathering it is hard to tell where to award the prize of beauty. Lady Grace Churchill is charming in her gold brocade."

"She is indeed. But, with all respect to your wife and mine, Leigh, Miss Haviland is surely queen of the ball."

"She is—looking very well," said Leigh, tranquilly surveying Edna, who had just given her hand to Keith; "culling homage from every *parti*, as a bee honey from every flower. But Miss Haviland is an old story to me. I was engaged to her for a year once."

"What, Leigh? You and Miss Haviland engaged?"

"Yes; when you were in India, I had that happiness."

"In the name of wonder, how did you give up such an hour?"

"I offered her my hand, and—she is very coquettish—and she put me on a *year's probation*. It is a fashion she has—waiting for whatever might happen, you see, and what happened was, I saw Violet, and that finished me. Violet is certainly charming to-night in white lace and wild roses, and the boy thrives in wondrous fashion."

Having thus doubly stabbed Alwood and the colonel, Leigh walked away to speak to other guests, and the lovely and innocent girl whose fair name and simple history he had darkened, unconscious of the wrong done her, finished her dance with Kenneth Keith.

Edna wondered that she did not see Alwood again that evening. But then she had seen him, and she was sure she was beloved. That was enough of happiness for one day. Love's young radiance filled her soul.

For Leigh, he had shot his poisoned arrow, and waited to see his victim fall.

On sweet dreams of her lover Edna's tender heart was fed during several days when they did not meet. Then he was present at one of Lady Burton's morning concerts; but grave, constrained, unlike himself. It was when one of Bach's finest figures was thundering through the room

that Alwood, who had placed himself by Edna in a window, said to her, in a low, stern tone:

"Tell me, was Lord Leigh ever your suitor in Cornwall?"

"Yes."

"Yes! He was your lover, and you put him on a year's probation, as you have me?" cried Alwood, indignantly.

"If I could only explain," began Edna, tremulously.

"It needs no explanation, only the simple fact," said Alwood, still in the low, but increasingly imperative tone.

"Was it so, or was it not?"

"It was so," said Edna; "but——"

She lifted her eyes in imploring shame, but Alwood was carried away by his jealous pain.

"Enough. That ends all between us," he said.

Wounded to the heart, Edna mastered herself so far as to bow, and say, softly:

"Yes, Lord Alwood."

He turned abruptly from her. The room seemed to reel, but she grasped the window draperies for support, and looked out into the street. A mist swam before her eyes, and the blood surged heavily through her heart. She did not know what music pealed about her, or what praise was said.

She saw that Alwood had departed. She stole from the room with faint, unsteady steps. When the guests were gone, Lady Burton found her lying on her bed, cold, white, almost rigid.

She was not able to meet that evening's engagement, nor the next; but the third day, hearing casually from Keith that "Alwood had gone to France," she summoned her courage, and appeared in society. But the lovely Edna visibly drooped. Her soft shell-tint paled; her voice had a mournful melody; her lovely eyes were as violets drowned in dews; and Lady Burton, shocked at a change which she could not explain, left London before the season was over, and took Edna to Keith Castle.

There was then no temptation to Violet to remain in London; and Leigh, triumphing in his dastardly work, agreed to return to the Towers. He had been gambling heavily, and wished to go over his steward's accounts. The results were far from satisfactory; they shocked him, and, as usual, when he was moody, he went to hide himself in "The Earl's Folly."

He had not been there since the fatal day when Bart Kemp had come there to him.

When he entered the upper room, the sunlight was falling over the leopard-skin lounge, and over Helen Hope, who lay there asleep.

CHAPTER XLVI.

“OH, WHO WILL HELP ME TO AVENGE MYSELF?”

When Leigh entered “The Folly,” Helen woke, brushed back the hair that had fallen over her brow, and sat up.

“Here again, Helen!” said Leigh. “I supposed that by this time your useless pursuit of me would have ended. Why are you in this room?”

“Because it is yours,” said Helen. “Because it brings me nearer to you—reminds me of you—and I knew you would come here.”

“Helen,” said Leigh, quietly, seating himself in his easy-chair, leaning back, and speaking with much self-control, “let us talk reasonably. You are a young, handsome, ambitious woman. With your appearance and accomplishments, you can, no doubt, secure a marriage that will place you in a good position. Come, now, I will give you money that will support you handsomely for two years. In that time, you can make a place in some large, thriving town, and make a good marriage. Or, if you wish to marry a man who would go to the colonies, I will use my influence to secure him a good appointment under Government.”

Helen’s cheek burned, and her eyes shot flames, but she answered, steadily:

“Norman, that would not make me a countess, nor give me *you*!”

“Are you still cherishing that idle dream?” said Leigh. “You have hinted, yes, plainly spoken, of death or divorce as freeing me of my countess. I wish you to understand me. Violet is in sound health; she takes care of herself; she has renewed life in her child, and is likely to survive me, which would only be the survival of the fittest. As for divorce, I want you to remember that Violet is a good, pure woman——”

“But,” interrupted Helen, “you can leave her. If you go to the Continent with me, she could demand a divorce.”

"Nonsense! If I did commit so rash an act, I assure you that Violet would quietly wait until I should come back. Remember, we have a child, and we both care too much for our son to blight his name and future with a public scandal."

"But a public scandal shall come and blight him!" hissed Helen between her clenched teeth.

"Besides," pursued Leigh, steadily, resolved that this should be a final interview with Helen, and that they should come to an understanding, "why should I go to the Continent with *you*? I do not care one straw for you. I never did."

"Norman Leigh," said Helen, "I have loved you madly, but I have warned you that I can hate you just as madly. If you will not follow me because you love me, you must because you fear me."

"Whatever you are capable of," said Leigh, with scorn, "I will have no more to do with you. Take my fair offers; go and make a name and place for yourself, or continue to hunt and threaten me, and I will hand you over to the police."

"Then I shall accuse you of the murder of Bart Kemp, who came here to see you on the twenty-first of November, and who is advertised for in this paper."

She held out a London *Times* with a marked paragraph. Lord Leigh read it coolly.

"I have seen this before."

"If I go to the advertiser and tell him that Kemp came here to you, and you flung him from that window into the Black Pool, what then?" cried Helen.

"I should have to disprove it. The Pool has been dragged; he is not there. The man, seized with epilepsy, fell into the Pool; but Adam, happily being near, dragged him out. He was a maniac; and Adam took him to a mine in Derbyshire, where he lived, until he escaped in the next March. He is mad."

"I do not believe it. You have imprisoned him in some mad-house. I will tell the attorney to seek him."

This was so exactly what Leigh had meant to do, that he blanched a little; but said, quietly:

"I tell you the truth; he has gone, and how or where I do not know. I do not fear him; he was merely a relative by marriage of my mother. Your plan has failed, just as

that other plan to find damaging papers in my house last winter failed. I tell you clearly that I will no longer endure your pursuit. I will deliver you to the police, on charge of felony, and Adam and the countess shall be my witnesses. Where are the Leigh papers you stole?"

"I took none," cried Helen.

"You did. I shall swear that valuable papers were lost when you rifled my closet. Now the tables are turned upon you. You are caught in your own net. Suppose all England does learn that I amused myself once by making love to a governess? The thing has been done before. The singular thing will be that the governess really expected to be Countess of Leigh, and keeps on insisting on a right, even when I am a married man. I warn you—never try to see me again!" And with a look of scorn and hate, Leigh strode out of "The Folly."

Helen Hope sprang to her feet with a wild cry. She flung up her arms and ground her teeth with rage.

"Oh, who will help me to avenge myself on this man?"

"I will help you," said an ardent voice.

Helen turned. The mist of fury passed from her eyes. There was a closet in one corner of the room; it had been shut, but now the door stood open, and in it, stood with eager face and extended right hand, the very man of whose murder she had been accusing Leigh, the man who had so singularly offered to help her in her plans for vengeance about a year and a half before.

"You! alive and well?" she faltered.

"Yes. What month was it when we were here before?"

"November."

"I thought so. And that November was not the last one?"

"No. It is nineteen months since."

"That is a long, strange time to be lost in darkness. Did it ever happen to you to be so lost?"

"No."

"It is a strange experience. A strange remedy; for do you know, from birth, I was subject to occasional loss of self and consciousness, and this blow on my head, that made me mad for seventeen months, has cured me finally. I am now a sound man. It is two months since I fully came to myself. It has taken me some time to recover myself, my memory, my plans. I did it at last, by means of

the advertisement in that paper. That put me face to face with my real self, as if in a glass. I took up life where I left it. I got the very kind of dress that is described, I reported to my attorney, I came back here, to the spot where I and myself parted company for a time, and as I came, and when I came, more clearly I remembered you. You were injured, angry, and needed a helper then; it is the same now—behold me at your orders.”

“When did you come here? How long have you been here?” demanded Helen, uneasily.

“I came early before you did. I heard your step below, and I slid into the closet. I came here to see Lord Leigh, because I am his mother’s step-son, and so a sort of relation; and I wanted to see him, and see how people of his quality live. Sometimes they are not ashamed of relations such as I am. I wanted to have a taste of aristocratic life if I could. I did not like to go up to the house at once; it looked so grand, and I had heard servants are stiff to strangers; and I thought I would have a look at the place, and might meet Lord Leigh. So I strolled round and round—I like these English woods—till I got here, by this queer house. When I came here first I had some letters of his mother’s, and if he tried to be proud with me, and not receive me as a step-brother should, I meant to threaten him to make those letters partly public. When I heard you calling for help to avenge yourself on him, I determined to go to your help, and gall him if I could, for he looks a proud, scornful aristocrat, and I hated him the minute I looked at him. I hate him worse now, since I heard you say you loved him.”

“Go on,” said Helen, averting her face.

“Well, when about two months ago I came to myself, and found that I had been insane, and had not been treated as a gentleman, and kept in a private asylum, with the knowledge of my lawyer, I saw this proud Leigh hated me, and wanted to hide me, ashamed that I could claim kin with his mother, and I resolved then to show him that trifling with Bart Kemp was as playing with powder. If I had not been shrewd and cunning above most men, would I in twenty years have made twenty thousand pounds? I tell you I have the papers and the witnesses now to bring this Lord of Leigh down to the dust. But stop and think—would you not rather be a rich man’s wife—go, as he sug-

gested, to queen it on one of the colonies—marry an official, say in Australia—and go to be a leader there, a queen, as your beauty and your manners fit you to be?”

“No, no!” cried Helen, “nothing for me but vengeance on him. You promise me revenge; I will have it—nothing but revenge!”

“But, if you have it, you must pay me my price.”

“Pay your price!” said Helen, looking him steadily in the eyes. “What is your price?”

“You must be my wife.”

“Your wife? You are a stranger to me.”

“But I love you.”

“You may have ten wives for all that I know.”

“I swear I have never married.”

“But you have been insane for months.”

“That is nothing; it will not happen again.”

“But I—why, I do not care for you.”

“That is a pity; but the love shall be on my side. I love you, and I mean to have you.”

“No. Ask something other than that.”

“Let me show you what might be. Leigh wants to be rid of you and of me. I heard his offers to you. I am not so vicious that I prefer revenge to love. I’d rather take you than harm him. Leigh will get me a good appointment. I am rich; he will give you a sum that will get you a trousseau like an empress. Women like jewels, dresses, servants, carriages. You shall have all. You shall have town house and country house in Australia, and queen it there, and I will be your chief slave. Speak the word, say you’ll take me, and I’ll go to Leigh for terms at once.”

“Never! never! never! I will not marry you!”

“Then you shall not have your revenge. I’ll go back to Australia to-morrow. I’ll only play into your hands if you pay me my price.”

“And can you really destroy Lord Leigh?”

“I can. I have it all laid out. It cannot fail.”

“And you will not carry out this plan unless——”

“Unless you reward me with your hand. Listen to me. That November day, when I came here, my motives were, as I told you, curiosity—a desire to see how Lord Leigh would receive me, and a wish to secure his help in advancing me in Australia. But when I saw you it was as if a flame swept over me and lit my heart. The love that cold-

blooded peer refuses you I can lavish on you a million fold. Hitherto I have cared more for riches than for anything else. Now I shall value my riches as I pour them out on you."

"Tell me your means of revenging me on Lord Leigh."

"Promise me, swear to me, that you will marry me."

"On condition that you succeed, and ruin Lord Leigh."

"Yes, on that condition."

"Then, I swear to you."

She held out her hand.

He seized it, and would have kissed it, but Helen shrank from him with a strong aversion.

"You will tell me now what steps to take," said Kemp.

"The first step will be to see Colonel Hartington." She mused a little, and said, "Let me do that. I will see him, and he will lay the matter before his lawyers. Then they will communicate with Lord Leigh's lawyers."

"Tell me, then, where I can call on you with papers, and we will complete our plans."

Helen gave him a place of meeting, and they parted.

While these various scenes of perverted human passion had been enacted at the "Earl's Folly," Violet, with little Rupert, had gone out to wander in the great sunny gardens, and there a little lad had found her and given her a note.

"Come to the Oak Knoll, dear Violet, where I can see you for a little."
EDNA."

Violet hastened to the pretty wooded rise, her favorite retreat, the very place where, asleep in her hammock, she had won the tender love of that sister friend. As she reached there she saw, standing in the shade, a white-robed figure, with golden hair and welcoming smile, and flung herself into the arms of Edna.

"Oh, Edna! You here, and you would not come to visit me, though I begged you so earnestly. Oh, how good it is to see you again. How lovely you look. You are a true harmony in white and gold. And see my boy, Edna, has he not grown! Is he not beautiful?"

Edna took the child in her arms and seated herself by Violet on the greensward.

"Dearest Violet," said Edna, "do not blame me for not coming to you. I really could not. But two days ago I

was sent for to Rose Lodge, as my aunt is ill, and I have taken the first free moment to meet you."

"I could never be vexed with you, or blame you a moment, dear! said Violet, caressing her friend's cheek, "especially when I see you sad and pale. What——"

"I have watched all night by my aunt," said Edna, hastily.

"Can I not help you? Will she be better soon?"

"I think I can take her to her sister in two days more."

"And my darling, where is your suitor—where is Alwood?"

"In France now," said Edna, a far-off look in her eyes.

"But coming soon?"

"Violet, I was wrong and foolish to tell you anything of that, for—it is all ended."

"Oh, Edna! Oh, I had hoped you, at least, would be happy in love."

"For my sake, Violet, say no more of it."

"Could I not comfort you if we were together? Oh, if you only could come to me, I am sure my boy would solace you. Edna, my husband told me that he offended you in your last visit, and—he is very sorry, and begs pardon."

"I cherish no enmity, but I cannot come."

There was a step among the last year's scattered leaves, and Lord Leigh came near. He started as he saw Edna and Violet with their arms about each other, the child lying in Edna's lap, and Violet attracting its attention by a bunch of scarlet poppies, which she took from her belt and held just beyond the eager grasp of the little fellow's dimpled hands.

Leigh bowed courteously to both ladies, and sat down near them. He felt relieved and elate. He thought he had finally shaken himself free of Helen Hope. He had been making some good resolutions, as he walked along. Now suddenly he came upon this charming scene. He really loved his child, and he saw that child an embodiment of health, laughing in the face of his lovely young mother. No picture could be more charming, the sylvan nook, the beautiful young women with enwreathed arms, the smiling little cherub at his play. But the boy made a spring, and scattered the petals of the poppies.

"Oh," cried Violet, with a shudder, brushing them

away, "it looks just as if we were all covered with spots of blood."

"Do not speak so, Violet," said Leigh, extending to her a large cluster of white roses, that he had picked while coming through the park.

Violet, with a smile, accepted the rose branch. She did not dream that at that instant the angry eyes of Helen Hope were watching them through the green screen leaves, and she was whispering to herself:

"Your doom is fixed! You will never again sit here in harmony. You will be scattered like the red petals of the poppy—scattered at my touch!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

"FIRST IN MY HEART FOREVER."

Violet Leigh had been bending in prayerful tenderness over the cradle of her child. As she studied the lovely features of the innocent sleeper, her thoughts turned to her own childhood, to her infancy, to the mother whom she could not remember.

She put her hand to a slender chain on her neck, that usually held a turquoise-set locket with her mother's miniature. It was gone, and she remembered that when Rupert had been brought to her for a few minutes' good-night play, in the drawing-room, she had amused him with it. Kate had left her; she went down to the drawing-room to find the locket.

The library door was open, and Leigh was sitting by the table, some papers before him, his head on his hand. She was struck by his dejected attitude, and his worn face, as she stole noiselessly by. The kindly thoughts that had filled her breast, rose paramount, and when she secured the trinket which she had lost, she stopped in the open door, and said, gently:

"Norman, why do you sit up late? Are you ill? You look troubled—sick. I should like to help you, Norman."

"Thanks—you are kind. I don't know as anything could help me, but killing me. This cursed mania for play will ruin me and the boy yet."

"Oh, Norman, cannot you refrain for his sake?"

"I thought I could, but I do not."

"Are you—are you needing money?"

"I'm short of funds, certainly. There are no rents due, and I have been dusedly unlucky."

Violet had a terrible dread of her husband's deadly vice. She shrank from feeding it, by supplying hundreds for the gaming-table. But then, if he were distressed for money, and she had it at hand——

She said, timidly:

"But, Norman, all I have is yours. Uncle Henry has just sent me this quarter's income, and I have nearly all of the last quarter. I seem to have no use for money. I cannot get rid of it. I ought not to have so much by me. Pray take it. It is hundreds of pounds; and, really, is it not dangerous for me to have it by me? It will keep me awake nights. Please take care of it for me."

"Waste it for you, you mean," said Leigh, bitterly.

"I am sure you will not do that. You will need it for improvements, traveling hospitality. But take it, use it as you will. Only do not be sad and ill."

She looked so benign, so innocent, so unselfish, that Leigh loathed himself that he was so unworthy of her. He cried out:

"Violet, you are a perfect little saint."

"Oh, no; but, Norman, if you could only like me a little, so that as Rupert grows up, he shall see no enmity or division between us, and if you could only be happy, in building up your estates, and your political influence, so that when Rupert comes of age he shall have all that his birth and title seem to promise him, oh, Norman, I should be so content."

"It seems as if I really must make a man of myself for your sake, and the child's," said Leigh, slowly.

"Wait here a minute," said Violet, eagerly.

She ran up the broad stairs, and returned carrying a casket of steel and brass.

With eager little fingers she unlocked it, and poured over the papers on the table, a heap of gold sovereigns, and crisp gray bank-notes.

"There, Norman! You know how to spend it, but I do not. You lay it out for me."

"Keep it yourself, child. I do not want your money."

But Violet clasped her hands behind her, and shook her pretty head.

"No, indeed! It worries me; I'm so glad to be rid of it! Why, some night some robber might come, if I kept all that. Now, Norman, don't worry any more. Good-night!"

He caught her hand and kissed the slender fingers.

"Would I were worthier of you, Violet!"

He expected that Helen Hope would conclude to make terms with him, and cease her pursuit on payment of a heavy sum. Such a sum was now before him, but—it came from Violet; and the hot blood surged over his worn temples at the thought.

As for Violet, she slept content after a good action, and as soon as she had breakfasted next day, filled a large basket with grapes and flowers, and hastened to Rose Lodge.

"I know you will think me intrusive, Edna," she said, after she had greeted her friend, and they were alone in the little rose-curtained parlor. "But I cannot be silent, when I know you are sad. There is such a sorrow in your sweet eyes, and you are paler and thinner. I know you are grieving. Tell me, is this a fatal quarrel with Lord Alwood?"

"There is no quarrel; only—do not ask me, Violet—he found he was mistaken—and all is ended between us."

"I cannot conceive of any person giving you up."

"Lord Alwood found me—less than he had believed me—and he gave me up. I cannot blame him; he is worthy of the best."

"He is unworthy of anything, if he could be false to you," cried Violet, hotly. "If he is so fickle, forget him."

"He is not fickle. Hush! I cannot let you speak against him. He is the noblest, purest of men. It is because his ideal of womanhood, of true love, is so high that I cannot reach it."

"Do not excuse him," said Violet; "he is inexcusable if he won your love and forsook you!"

"My darling, I cannot explain; but I cannot hear him blamed. He may have been a little hasty; but there—I can say no more—only do not torture me by recalling him, by condemning him; for every word against him cuts my heart. Violet, I loved him, I do love him, and that love I shall cherish in my heart forever. I can live for him, hope and pray for his good, though we are forever parted.

From the first of our acquaintance, I never doubted that he had all my heart; I only doubted if I could fill his."

"And though forsaken by him, you will live for him!"

"I will forget him as far as I ought, and as I get strength to forget; but I shall turn to no other. Violet, you and your child shall now be dearest to my heart."

"Oh, Edna," cried Violet, passionately, "if I had been so true and steadfast, I might have been a happy woman!"

She flushed, ashamed that even in closest intimacy she had betrayed the haunting secret of her heart. In constant care for her child, she flattered herself often that Keith's image was finally torn from her heart; but then the light of some hidden experience would flash upon her, and show him dearest still. This was agony to her gentle, conscientious soul; how could she blame her husband for anything, when she knew that he was not first and sole in her affection?

But lying awake that night, mournfully thinking of her friend, she remembered that she had told Leigh of Alwood's year of probation; she recalled how he had been mad after Edna, and how dark and secret were his methods, and a terrible revelation flashed upon her.

It was Norman, her husband, who had destroyed the happiness of Edna, and she herself it was who had given him opportunity to break Edna's heart.

Violet knew Lord Leigh well enough to realize that all upbraiding, all reproach or accusation would but harden him. If she would bring him to repentance, to undoing evil, it must be by gentle methods. If he had, as she believed, been the means of angering Lord Alwood against Edna, he must be persuaded to undo his work. She reflected that he now felt not unkindly toward herself, and she must make use of his kindness to aid Edna. Such were her thoughts during the early, wakeful hours of morning, but the time had not yet come for saying what she would say of Edna. She must lead up to that by gentle degrees; the theme was most delicate.

Alas! while she waited to feel her way, the hour of Leigh's opportunity passed by forever.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

“ONCE FOR ALL, REVENGE OR FAREWELL.”

On that same sunny summer morning Helen Hope walked with Bart Kemp in the most secluded part of the Leigh woods. Kemp had called for her at the cottage, where she lodged, and together they walked in the forest.

“Hold out your hand; I have something to give you.”

“I don’t think I want anything,” said Helen, keeping her hands closely by her side.

“You’ll want this,” said Kemp. “I rushed to London yesterday noon, and came back by the early train to-day. I laid out a hundred pounds for you, and I’d as lief lay out a thousand, or five thousand.”

He touched the spring of a box, and showed a bracelet, a ring, and a medallion, richly set.

“Why did you get that for me?” asked Helen.

“Because I adore you; because they set off your beauty. I never loved any other woman. Let me put them on you.”

He drew her to a seat on the root of a tree, and put the jewels upon her. Helen did not care to take them—only from one source could gifts have a value—but the fierceness of the man’s love dominated her, and she beheld with a strange sympathy love lavished on her such as she lavished on Leigh, and equally without return.

“After all, Helen,” said Kemp, on his knees at her feet, “why do we stay here and pursue vengeance, when we might live for love? If you speak the word, I can get, through Leigh, a part of a thousand pounds a year to add to my income, and you shall have a thousand pounds for a trousseau. You shall not have a wish ungratified.”

“You forget,” said Helen, “that my whole life would be an ungratified wish, if I were not revenged on Lord Leigh.”

“I don’t mind pulling Leigh down,” said Kemp, “only I hate to spend the time. The plan is a good one; it cannot fail.”

"It is a plan, then?" said Helen, eagerly.

"I don't think I ever could have quite come up to the point of trying it merely to revenge myself. I should only have frightened him a little. Do you realize, that to gratify your wish for vengeance, I risk a life in the penal settlements?"

"But you will succeed, and then you earn—life with me," said Helen, bending toward him.

"I'll risk it," he said, clasping her for one moment close in his arms.

They wandered back along the way they had come. Helen leaned on Kemp's arm and strove by every wile to bind him to her interest.

"You have always been poor, I think," he said.

"Listen to me," said Helen. "I have not only been poor, but I have not a known nor legal relative in the world. I am a nameless, miserable foundling.

"That is nothing to me," said Kemp, hotly. "Your beauty and spirit are your dower. You are, I am sure, accomplished."

"So they say, in all that makes a governess—music, drawing, languages, dancing," said Helen, with a sneer.

"Those things are better than a name," cried Kemp. "I love you for yourself. But once more I urge you. Let us leave England, which has used you hardly. Let us go without flight or risk. We can be married by special license. Come, forsake this old, bitter life, and try a life of better things."

"Once and for all—revenge on Leigh, or farewell!" said Helen, with fury.

"Let it be revenge, then," said Kemp, leaving her at the gate.

But, left alone, what floods of torture surged over Helen's soul! Leigh had once spoken words of love, and they had been music to her heart; they had been only words of guile and pretense. This man, she knew, spoke the language of a sincere, if a sudden passion. He made her honorable offers; he would lavish on her such tenderness as she wasted on Leigh, and he would ask in return only the cold crumb of endurance. Yet for this man's passion she had only aversion to return.

After a troubled night, she dispatched a messenger—an

idle little truant from the village school—who carried Lord Leigh this note:

“The man Kemp has come back. I can tell you where he is, and what papers he has. The papers are dangerous, ruinous, to you. Come and see me at the ‘Folly.’ We meet for the last time. If you cannot care for me, we part forever.”

To learn the whereabouts of Kemp, and the nature of his papers, was a matter of importance to Leigh. A wise and good man, who had no dark places in his life to conceal, would have found safety in referring the entire matter to his lawyers, into whose hands the affair, if pressed, must ultimately come. But Leigh’s genius was for concealments, bribery, deceit, and his first impulse was to find Kemp and buy him off. He did not doubt that Helen, on consideration, would accept his offer of money, and he had faith only in a compromise that rested on a money basis.

Thus, he rashly set out for “The Earl’s Folly.”

Helen was waiting for him.

“I had not meant to see you again, Helen,” he said, seating himself opposite her; “but I suppose you have concluded to take the offers I made you. A woman such as you are need not lack for suitors—for rich suitors even—I think you can get out of life all *you* have any right to expect from it.”

“Your step-brother, Bart Kemp, is rich, and he wants to marry me,” said Helen.

“Very good,” said Leigh, cordially. “I will give you an unlimited trousseau, and do all I can for him *in Australia*.”

“Perhaps,” said Helen, with intention, “you will be obliged to do more for him on his own account. He has papers that will unseat you from your earldom. You have mocked at my birth, how will you be pleased to find a broad bar sinister in your own?”

“It is false, atrocious woman!” cried Leigh, leaping to his feet, pale with fury.

“It is true as truth. I have seen the papers. And only I can get those papers from his hands. It is in my power to bring you down to my own nameless level. Your wife will no more be Countess of Leigh. No coronet waits that baby earl whom she holds in her arms. Utter ruin, as a thunderbolt, will fall upon you, and I hold that thunderbolt in my hands.”

"Do not think that I shall abandon my rank and my privileges without a struggle, and all that power, and wealth, and prestige can do to maintain me in my place will be done. Your plot will fail, wretch!" cried Leigh.

"Heap names of scorn on me," said Helen. "I bide my time. I will fling them back when I see you and yours leaving Leigh Towers, carrying no name but your mother's name of Kemp. Come and sit down at my side, Norman; we are equals now."

"I could strangle you!" cried Leigh, in a paroxysm of rage.

"Yes, do. Strangle me, and fling me into the Pool. But Kemp has the papers, safe with his lawyers. You will only add a trial for murder to the trial of your title!"

Leigh dropped back into his chair.

"I defy you."

"At least read the list of our evidence," cried Helen, and lightly tossed him a folded paper.

He read, and great beads of agony stood pearled upon his brow. Verily the case was formidable. Helen Hope waited for the effect.

"I shall fight to the bitter end!" said Leigh.

"And the end will be bitter, when you resign your coronet to your dearest enemy, Hartington."

Leigh gnashed his teeth.

"It could not even hereafter revert to your boy—as nearest kin to the colonel—he will be barred out."

Leigh groaned. He was not a brave man, nor a strong man, his life had given him that ill conscience that makes cowards of us all."

"There is a way of escape," said Helen. "I can secure these papers, and tell you how to destroy these witnesses. I will do it on my own terms."

"And the terms?"

"Make me your countess, and you are safe. You will be still Lord of Leigh!"

"There are some depths of infamy to which I cannot go down," said Leigh, furiously, "and to link myself with you is one of them. As well lose my earldom as live the fugitive Lord of Leigh, the slave of the governess Helen Hope, while all England rings with my folly, and my son grows up to execrate alike my memory and my crime."

"You refuse me?"

“Utterly and forever! Words cannot speak my detestation of you, Helen Hope. You are a monster, a serpent in a woman’s form.”

Helen rose. She was white as one dead. She shook like a reed in the wind.

“I see all is ended between us, Norman,” she said. “I will be revenged on you. Live now in dread of me! When you go out a nameless exile from the house where you were born, remember that Helen Hope—the woman you deceived, played with, despised, mocked, rejected—has stripped you of your honors, and brought you down to sit in that same dust from which she sprung.”

She turned and left the “Folly,” going as some dark prophetess whose errand is done.

Leigh sat as one stunned by a heavy blow. The words that he had read on the paper were branded on his brain. Instead of feeling energy and courage to rise to ward off or return the impending blow, he sat down in a heavy stupor, as giving up the battle before it had begun. Already he felt as if the fatal blow had fallen and he had met his doom.

He returned to the Towers in this nightmare state. From afar he saw Violet on the terrace, with her boy in her arms. Would Violet try to save him for the sake of the child?

CHAPTER XLIX.

“I AM COUNTESS OF LEIGH!”

One of the prettiest villas of Kew was inhabited by Colonel Hartington, and his wife, the Honorable Lady Clare.

Colonel Hartington and one of his friends were amusing themselves with knocking about the balls on the table in the little billiard-room in the east wing of the villa, when a footman announced that a lady was in the drawing-room, waiting to see the colonel.

He found, apparently lost in a contemplation of a picture, by Cuyp, above the fire-place, a tall, handsome woman, in a dark, rich dress.

"You asked for me, madam," said the colonel, with a low bow. "Have I the honor——"

"My name is Hope, Miss Hope," said the visitor, "and I have come to see you on business of the greatest importance; also of the greatest privacy."

"I am at your service," said the colonel, politely.

"It is business that should only be discussed behind closed doors. A word of it, breathed prematurely, would be disastrous. This room is so public, servants near, and possibly other callers admitted. My business may take some time; an hour or two——"

"Surely it can hardly concern me. If it is the presentation of some charity, a prospectus left——"

"It concerns no charity," said Miss Hope, with a smile, "unless to give you your own is charity. And it does concern you, if you are, as I believe, a collateral heir-presumptive of the Earldom of Leigh."

"I was," corrected the colonel, "heir presumptive until the birth of the Honorable Rupert Leigh."

"In a word," said Miss Hope, with impatience, "my errand is important, and I trust you will not bar me in performing it. I am doing my duty. I have made an important discovery, and I come here to discharge my conscience of it. Am I to have full opportunity to speak with you privately?"

"Certainly—in my library. But I fancy that this subject is one which equally interests my wife, Lady Clare. Shall she make a third in our interview?"

"Act your pleasure as to that," said Helen, calmly, as, gathering her lace mantle about her, she moved with the colonel to the library.

Presently Lady Clare entered, cold, haughty, with a supercilious lifting of her eyebrows, at meeting a person whom she had never seen "in society." Her motions had a stately, swan-like grace, but the low, icy tones of her carefully trained voice filled Helen Hope with a fury of hate; and for some minutes she hesitated whether, for sake of revenge on Leigh, she could put this proud, scornful creature in the place of the sweet, gentle-toned Violet, who, in all provocations, had never given her a cruel look or word. In fact, Colonel Hartington had twice to say to her, "Madam, we hear you," before Helen could make up her mind to play into the hands of this arrogant pair, who

would ruthlessly have trampled her as the mire beneath their feet. But her heart burned with jealous wrath against Leigh, and she spoke:

"I am engaged in marriage to a step-son of the late Countess of Leigh."

"Of the Countess of Lord Allan Leigh! Was she not a spinster when she married my cousin?" cried the colonel.

"She was, or said she was, or thought she was, a widow," said Helen, quietly.

Colonel Hartington and Lady Clare looked at each other.

"I had no idea of *that*," said the colonel.

"Since the question was so important, I wonder you or your family did not investigate the antecedents of the adventuress countess," suggested Helen.

"It was in my father's time, and he was a man to take things easily, with the least trouble," replied Hartington.

"It was culpable negligence!" cried Lady Clare, angrily.

"As I said," pursued the quiet, clear voice of Helen, "I am engaged to her step-son. I have lived near the Towers, and know of the family there, and their claims. By accident, in conversing with the gentleman to whom I have referred, I discovered that the claims of the present lord were null and void; that he was not the lawful Lord of Leigh; and, looking at a Peerage, I found that you were his nearest kin; in fact, you were the legal successor of the late earl."

"What is this?" cried the colonel. "This passes belief. What proofs have you of such statements?"

"I know they are true," cried Lady Clare. "I feel it."

"Not feeling, not intuition, but hard, solid facts, must satisfy lawyers and the highest court in the land, when a claim such as Norman Leigh's is to be invalidated," said the colonel.

"Are you willing to investigate such proof?" asked Helen.

"Willing!" cried Lady Clare, losing her hauteur, and seizing Helen's hand; "he must, he shall investigate."

"But what are these proofs?—what is this story?" said the colonel, more cautiously.

"Let me first say," said Helen, "that I come here in the cause of honesty and justice. I am not here to sell a secret, nor stipulate for rewards. If we had wished for money out of this discovery, we could, no doubt, have

sold out to the person now called Lord Leigh, whose wife is rich enough to pay any price to maintain the title of her child. We could have sold the evidence for any sum, and that evidence would have been forever destroyed. But the gentleman to whom I refer is already wealthy, and he has lived so long in Australia, making his fortune, that he did not estimate the value of the facts in his possession, nor how important to either you or Lord Leigh they would be. When I suggested that duty and justice required that they should be laid before you, he allowed me to come. Will you read this statement?"

She handed the colonel the same paper which she had tossed to Leigh a few days before in the "Folly."

The colonel read it with breathless eagerness. His wife followed the lines, leaning over his shoulder.

"And this is true?" they cried, simultaneously.

"Will you refer it to your lawyer?" said Helen.

"I am Countess of Leigh," cried Lady Clare, in transport.

CHAPTER L.

BIGAMY OR NO BIGAMY.

The firm of Wells & Epston enjoyed one of the highest reputations in London, indeed in all England, for shrewd practice and business management. Their office was thronged with clients, bringing them difficult cases. Their fame was not only popular, but professional. Other lawyers feared and respected them.

This firm had been, since its establishment, the legal advisers of the Hartingtons, and the rich colonel, who was possibly to be Lord of Leigh, had enjoyed a large share of the cares and counsels of these eminent barristers.

Not three hours after Helen Hope's interview with Colonel Hartington, the colonel drove with furious haste to the Temple, and with much eagerness demanded a private interview with the firm.

Having made his report, he laid before them the paper which Miss Hope had given him. It was in her clear, bold hand, a statement of the case made out, and a list of the evidence procurable. Nothing could be more clear.

"This is very well done," said Mr. Wells, of the firm of Wells & Epston. "You say a lady gave it to you. Where can she be seen?"

"She said she would be for two days at the Golden Cross Hotel, Strand. And the man Kemp, also. You must see these people at once," said Hartington. "My carriage is in the court. We will go to them immediately."

They found Helen Hope in a private parlor at the Golden Cross, and Kemp was promptly summoned. A long conversation ensued, and the attorneys and their client departed.

Meanwhile, at Leigh Towers, Norman the Earl sat as one who waits for a blow to fall. The words that Helen had written were ever limned in fire on the air before him. Finally, suspense ended in an earnest summons to London, to meet his legal advisers. The place appointed for the two law firms, and their respective clients, was the now closed and lonely house of Lord Leigh, facing the green park.

The case was then briefly stated by Mr. Epston on behalf of Colonel Hartington, thus:

"The present Norman, known as Earl of Leigh, is and has been holding his earldom and estates and privileges of Leigh upon a false and invalid title, evidence being offered to show, that the said Norman, called Earl of Leigh, is not legitimate, his mother having been guilty of bigamy when she married the late Lord Leigh. And this bigamy was without the knowledge of any of the parties concerned in, or cognizant of, said marriage."

The pieces of evidence were stated thus: The lady known as late Countess of Leigh was first married to Bart Kemp, an attorney, of the town of Meath, Ireland, who died at a small hamlet called Shields. Said Bart Kemp was a widower with one son. Both father and son were subject to occasional fits resembling epilepsy. Bart Kemp and his second wife agreed so illy that the lady left him, and went to live in England with her father, a half-pay officer. After two years' separation, the wife received news, first by a newspaper paragraph, and then by letter, of the death of Kemp. Mrs. Kemp, a week or two after this return to freedom, made the acquaintance of the then Lord Leigh. She was a handsome woman, and succeeded in infatuating

the earl, and was married to him in the sixth month after hearing of her widowhood.

But the evidence now produced by Bart Kemp, son of the attorney, showed that his father did not die at the time stated. He was supposed to have died, and was prepared for burial, but his apparent death was but a prolonged instance of the state of insensibility into which he sometimes fell, and he revived, and lived in a low and nearly imbecile condition for six months and four days after, really dying nine days after the marriage of his supposed widow to Lord Leigh. Therefore the marriage was invalid, being unintentional bigamy on the part of the Countess of Leigh, and her son, the present Norman, was illegitimate, and could not inherit the estates or title of Leigh, which estates and title properly passed to Colonel Hartington, as next of kin.

The proofs advanced for this remarkable case were a formally drawn up document by the grave-digger of Shields, stating at what date he buried Mr. Kemp. Second, the inscription on Mr. Kemp's grave-stone. Third, a statement of the stone-cutter that he had lettered the stone at such a date; and, chief of all, a document written and signed by Mr. Kemp's physician, stating the circumstances of apparent death; the revival and date of real death. This physician was dead, but many witnesses would testify to his handwriting.

This was the terrible case which Norman Leigh heard made out against his claim to the peerage.

He was as a man stunned by a heavy blow. He could not rouse himself to contend with fate. He could not even hope for a happy issue out of his distresses.

It was the second day before he roused himself to call Violet to the library.

He explained the case to her, and then fell into a stupor, from which she was unable to arouse him.

Violet summoned old Adam, and told him the story.

"Adam, you were at the marriage. You knew both parties."

Violet had called the old man to her boudoir. He looked about cautiously.

"My lady, the late countess was a reckless one, to stop at nothing, and her father, the major, was like her. I knew there had been a marriage in Ireland. It would not have been unlike her, my lady, to do this thing knowingly.

But Lord Leigh was surely in the dark about it. He never knew."

Violet sent for the lawyer. He came, but could find no papers to help the case.

After the lawyer had gone, Violet in vain tried to rouse Leigh to take some active measures in his own behalf.

"My lady," said the reluctant Adam, "don't look for help from him. He has been taking opium heavily since the affair came up. I cannot make him stop the opium, and I believe he is trying to kill himself."

"Adam, telegraph at once to Sir Roger Parker, and when he comes give Lord Leigh entirely into his hands, and act just as Sir Roger says, for he may be able to save him."

Then ringing the bell, she said:

"Nurse, get yourself and Rupert ready at once to go with me to London. I have sent for a physician for Lord Leigh. Now I am going to save my child's name and inheritance. My Rupert shall still be heir of Leigh."

CHAPTER LI.

"I HAVE COME TO CLAIM YOUR PROMISE."

From a timid, fearful child, Violet, under the tutelage of sorrow, and of maternal love, had grown to the earnest, resolute, thoughtful woman. The position in which she was now placed was terrible. Lord Leigh, instead of rising to defend himself, seemed to yield to his fate, in a dull apathy, and instead of bestirring himself like a man, was finding oblivion in opium, possibly with hope of thereby ending his life. Violet saw that her child, if undefended by others than his father, must lose his name, estates, and titles. True, there were the lawyers to defend him; but Violet felt that they should be reinforced by other help and interest.

When the words of Adam had revealed the sad state of her husband, Violet looked at her boy, who seemed no better than fatherless, and remembered how Kenneth Keith had taken him in his arms, and said:

"I will be his friend always, forever."

That promise she meant now to claim. She was on her way to London to throw herself for help upon Keith's friendship and his manly strength. She had learned by a casual remark in one of Lady Burton's letters, that Lord Keith was at his London house, detained there by certain business. To that house Violet directed her way taking a cab at the station.

Keith was in his library when the footman flung open the door, saying:

"My lord, the Countess of Leigh!"

Kenneth turned; there stood the beautiful young countess, her babe in her arms, laughing and reaching for the white plume wreathed about his mother's hat. Behind the mother and child the tall, strong figure of Magery Rogers.

Keith sprang forward.

"Violet! Countess Leigh! Is it possible?"

Violet met him, and with the beautiful look deepened in her sweet, brown eyes, put her son in Keith's arms.

"Kenneth, I have come to claim your promise for my boy. You said you would be his friend forever. He needs help; they are trying to rob him of all he has, even of his name, and he has no helper but you."

Keith received the child loyally, and holding the mother's hand in his, said, gravely:

"Violet, all that a deathless friendship, all that brotherly love, all that youth, and health, and confidence, and some knowledge of the world, can do—all that an Englishman and an English peer can do—is at your service. Speak, and I devote myself entirely to you, to your child, to your husband, until all your wishes are accomplished."

"God grant it," said the deep voice of Dame Magery, "for we are in a sore strait at Leigh."

"Violet," said Keith, "how is it that Leigh is doing nothing?"

"He is sick," said Violet. "He seemed overwhelmed, and in an apathy, and he has taken large quantities of opium. I have sent Sir Roger to him. He rouses to do nothing?"

"You wish me to see the lawyers, and act and feel as I would if I were in Leigh's place—as if my title were impugned, as his is?"

"Yes, Kenneth, that is what I want."

"It is exactly what I will do for you, freely, heartily."

Oh, how trustfully the brown eyes of Violet turned to the Saxon blue eyes of Kenneth. How his heart quivered with a mighty pain, that this was not his wife's face turned to him with such intense confidence.

"Oh, Violet," said Keith, with a deep sigh, "you know that all my heart and my service are yours, only yours, forever."

"Kenneth, when I feel desolate and alone, I think of you—that Rupert and I will still have a friend and helper in you, and I get hope and comfort again."

And they were both silent for a little space.

"I must go," said Violet. "I have done all that I can do here. I leave my case in your hands. My husband is sick and wretched. My place is by him; my home is threatened, and my place is there. You will go to the lawyer's at once."

"Yes. Give me a letter explaining Lord Leigh's state, and my friendship and position to him and you. Here, sit by this desk and write it. Are you returning to the Towers to-night? You will be very weary."

"It is as well. I could not rest," said Violet, sadly.

"Keep up heart. I think you will come triumphantly out of these snares. I have faith in your cause."

She finished the note. Then took her sleeping babe from old Magery's lap, and held him up for Kenneth to kiss.

"He will owe all to you," she said, wistfully.

Kenneth kissed the child's soft face, and then one of the satin smooth little hands that held him.

He rang for his carriage, and took Violet and her nurse to the station, and made every arrangement for their comfort. Then calling up an encouraging smile, he stood on the platform, waving his hat as the train swept them away.

CHAPTER LII.

"I WARN YOU! YOU MOVE TO RUIN!"

During the days and weeks while the lawyers were mutually preparing for the contest of "*Leigh versus Hartington*," Helen Hope was living at the hotel of the Golden

Cross, Strand. Kemp remained at the Mitre, in Chancery Lane, but his infatuation for Helen grew hourly, and he was constantly going to visit her, or insisting on taking her to ride or walk, or for trips on the Thames steamers.

Helen was in a fever of unrest; despair, vengeance, rage, remorse, contended in her soul, and she submitted to going about with Kemp because any company was better to her than solitude, any speech was preferable to the horror of her own thoughts.

She heard that Lord Leigh was lying at the point of death in brain fever, and accusing herself of his condition, she made up her mind to fling herself from London Bridge if she heard of his death.

Kemp was constantly buying rich presents for Helen, and whenever she admired anything, he promised to give it to her as soon as they were married. For reasons of his own, he dreaded the progress of the coming case of "*Leigh versus Hartington*," and again and again he passionately besought Helen to marry him at once, setting out for Australia, and destroying before they left all the pieces of evidence in their hands.

But no persuasions, no lover's vows, no bribes, would lure Helen Hope from her deadly purpose. In fact, Kemp was the object of her abhorrence, and she never intended to fulfill her contract of marriage with him; he was to be forsaken as soon as he had accomplished her purpose of vengeance. A less infatuated suitor than Kemp would have perceived this.

One afternoon Kemp and Helen were just about to go out for a walk in Hyde Park when Lord Keith was announced.

He was struck with Helen's appearance.

"I feel sure I have seen you before," he said.

"Yes, you have. You were at Berne. I saw you often with Mrs. Kemp."

"Really? But I am not acquainted with any Mrs. Kemp."

"Calling herself Countess of Leigh," said Helen, emphatically.

"Oh, the Countess of Leigh! Yes, I am a friend of hers."

"And it is for her sake, in some way, I suppose, that you call upon me?"

"Not merely for her sake but for the sake of many. I have from boyhood known Lord Leigh. I am fond of his little son. As a peer of England I regret to see the honor of an ancient family impugned. As a man, I regret to see people going wrong, moving on a disastrous way. I see here, in Mr. Kemp, a man who, by years of industry, has accumulated a handsome fortune, and who has the respect of his friends in Australia. I regret to see such a man enter upon a scheme that may, and no doubt will, utterly ruin him. You, Miss Hope, are one whom I should with sorrow see a ruined woman, a convicted criminal. I come to-day to warn you of the probable outcome of this suit. Will you accept my warning?"

"We rely upon the law, which protects English witnesses in the statement of truth," said Helen. "We found out facts, and we made them known to the right parties. We fear nothing."

Keith turned to Kemp.

"Do you reflect what you may do? If you are fearless for yourself, do you consider that you are betraying this lady to a terrible doom?"

"What?" cried Kemp, flashing crimson and leaping to his feet. "What?"

"To transportation!" said Keith, calmly, "for ten, fifteen, or twenty years, or for life, according to the pleasure of the judge. Your case being aggravated, for life, probably."

"What in fury do you mean?" shrieked Kemp, "What crime do you charge on us, on me? We can prove all that we say."

"You will be poorly off if you cannot. The crime I refer to is forgery."

"Do not try to frighten us," said Helen, advancing between the paling Kemp and Lord Keith. "The pride of this sham countess and sham earl shall be laid low. We defy you, Lord Keith?"

At this instant Keith was called from the room to see Mr. Storms, the lawyer.

"I followed you here," he said, "to tell you that I have discovered that money is not this man's object. He has twenty thousand invested in three per cents. Also, I approached him through a third party, and he utterly refuses to sell out. I think the instigator is the woman; and if

that is so, be sure there is some old story between her and Leigh, and jealousy and revenge are driving her. The fact is, there is a strong collusion between three witnesses—the man, the woman, and the grave-digger. The stone-cutter is a slow, honest fellow, and we can get at the bottom of his case, I have no doubt.”

“Did you carry out your effort at bribery with the woman?” asked Lord Keith, curiously.

“I’ll own I did. I sent a man from Scotland Yard, and the woman won’t sell out. He says she fights for vengeance. She rejected his offers with fury and scorn. They are not to be caught in that trap.”

“I am glad of it. I prefer to win the case by clear open dealing.”

Lord Keith returned toward the private parlor where he had left Miss Hope and Kemp. He had ever a light step, and as he reached the door, he saw that the latch had not caught, and that a single touch of his finger would set it open. Instinctively he laid his fore-finger on the panel, and to the gentle pressure, the door swung wide.

Kemp and Helen were standing in a window, their backs to the room, and Keith who was quick of hearing, heard Kemp say:

“Helen, consider! For myself I fear nothing, but for you I fear all. I will promise you anything, everything if you will agree to drop all this and come with me.”

“You promised me vengeance, and I will have that or nothing,” said Helen, turning to him with fury.

“But consider what he said. Can you, in your prond beauty, be placed at the prisoner’s bar, transported like a felon?”

“It will never happen if you do not cowardly fail me.”

“It is not fear for myself——” began Kemp.

“And I, at all risk, resolve to follow——” Helen turned, and saw Lord Keith in the door-way. She paled.

“Are you listening, Sir Peer!” she cried, with fury. “A lordly act, truly! Well, now, you understand me. This case is no made case, it is no fiction, but it was not simple frankness and desire of honest justice that induced us to go to Lord Leigh—called Hartington. No! for me, it was love of vengeance. I thirst for vengeance as a tiger thirsts for blood! I have vowed it, and I will have it! I have sold my soul to obtain vengeance, and am I going back at a word? I

hate the so-called Lord Leigh. I hate that sham little countess, with the brown ruffled hair, and the blushes and the dimples."

"Who might have had you convicted of felony, when, in disguise, you penetrated her house, and rifled her papers, and who forgave you," said Lord Keith.

"Who then knew my power, and dared not contend with me!" cried Helen.

"I warn you, you move to ruin," said Keith, firmly.

"And I warn you that I have set my price as vengeance, bitter and irretrievable, and I will have my price!"

CHAPTER LIII.

"WHAT WERE YOU PAID, AND BY WHOM?"

Lord Kenneth Keith was at the villa of Colonel Hartington, in deep consultation.

"I know, colonel," he said, "that you would not for one moment press this claim to the Earldom of Leigh were it not, in your view, well founded."

"Certainly, I would not. I have all respect for the head of the house of Leigh, and as long as I believed Norman held that position, I regarded him accordingly; but I have too much honor for an ancient line to leave it for a day longer than can be helped in the hands of a usurper. Such I now consider Norman."

"But should it be proved that the statements made are false and malicious, the testimony purchased, you would feel yourself in a bad position if you contested the title on such ground."

"I should, Lord Keith, and therefore I wish the lawyers on both sides carefully to sift the evidence before we bring the case into court."

"I have seen this Miss Hope, and I feel sure that her testimony is not the simple, unbiased statement you deem it. She is influenced by revenge."

"Yet may be stating a fact, all the same. "I do not believe in some of her suggestions, but you will admit it is a strong case?"

The next express took Lord Keith on a second trip to Ireland, to the town of Shields. Again he examined the

records of the Dublin stone-cutters' books; all were correct. Then he closely questioned the grave-digger at Shields. The minister who buried Kemp was dead. Shields was but a hamlet, and had no register of deaths, except that kept by the grave-digger.

The grave-digger was a sullen fellow, with a certain confusion in his dogged air.

"I've give in my testimony in a signed paper," he said, gloomily; "and I sticks to what I writ."

"What were you paid for it, and by whom?" asked Keith.

While Lord Keith talked with the grave-digger, the man was standing in a grave which he was preparing for an old pauper. Close behind the trench stood a little wooden house, where the man of graves lived, and where bodies were sometimes laid to await burial. A window of this small house opened over the scene of the sexton's present work. The sash was raised, but a brown moreen curtain fell over the window.

Behind the curtain stood Bart Kemp, eying Lord Keith through a tiny rent in the moreen, and hearing every word that he said.

When Keith asked that question, "What were you paid for it, and by whom?" Bart trembled visibly, and great drops rolled over his face. He fairly held his breath until the man replied:

"I gets my money by sexton work, not secrets. Stand back, mister, or this dirt will get on your boots."

"It might be well for you to tell the truth," said Keith.

"I've told naught else, and writ naught else."

Keith studied the man's hard face for a little time in silence, and then walked away.

Kemp moved the curtain a little.

"You did well," he said. "Don't be frightened into going back on your statements."

"Ay, I know; but mebbe I will get transported for this. Hang you, Kemp, why couldn't you left me alone to dig graves?"

"Hold fast to your statement, mind you, and you'll get a fortune out of it," said Kemp.

But he went back to London with a quaking heart. The breaking down of this witness meant ruin to him and to Helen Hope.

Helen had made her own use of the brief time—less than three days—of Kemp's trip to Shields. She had found that Violet Leigh had been summoned to London for a conference. Immediately Helen sent for an acquaintance of her own—a woman of about her age and size, with dark face and black hair. Helen requested her to come to her about dusk.

"Now," she said, "I want you to change clothing with me, and stay here at the Golden Cross in my place. See no one; keep the room very dark; ring for the chambermaid, and tell her to bring you tea and toast at noon, as you have a sick headache, and will not rise. Keep your face to the wall. I will come back to-morrow evening."

"And for what is this?" asked her friend, as they changed clothes.

"Merely so I can prove I was here, if am declared to have been somewhere else," said Helen.

"Trust me to act your part," said her friend. "It is little to do for you, when you have been so kind to me, and shared your salary with me when I have been ill."

Leaving her friend in her place, Helen took a night train to Sussex, and went to Leigh Towers.

"An old lady wishes to see my lord," said a servant, going next morning to the room where Lord Leigh was moodily trying to interest himself in studying a system of probabilities in returning members.

"Let her come in," said Leigh, flinging his pamphlet across the room.

A woman in rusty black, white-haired, a stoop in her shoulders, entered. As soon as they were left alone, she locked the door, pulled off the white hair and widow's bonnet, took out the padding that made the change in her shapely shoulders, and stood forth—Helen Hope!

"Norman, have you yet learned my power?"

"I understand what you have done. Go and do your worst. Why do you come here?"

"Because my heart misgives me; I cannot ruin you, Norman."

It struck Lord Leigh that he might make terms with his enemy if he tried kindness. He held out his hand and said, softly:

"After all this, is there still affection in your heart for me, Helen?"

"It is all affection. I attacked you for love's sake."

"A strange way, truly, to show love."

"It was to force you to me, since you would not come otherwise. Listen to me, Norman."

She knelt down beside him, laid her head against the arm of his chair, and looked into his face.

"How worn and thin you look. You have been ill, and it is all my fault. And yet I cannot repent of it, for I would far rather you should die than live far from me, with others, hating me."

"Helen, do you call that love?"

"Listen. I meant, if I heard of your death, to fling myself into the Thames."

"I wish you had had the provocation, then. It would be better for both of us."

"But, you see, we both live. Let us be happy. You will get strong and happy if you come with me. Come, we will go to Switzerland, or North Italy, and I will nurse you back to strength. I will be your friend, your nurse, your entertainer, your slave. Try, me, Norman."

"As a reward for ruin? A payment for your malice?"

"Norman, I, only I, can break down the evidence that destroys your title. In my fury, I sought revenge, but—oh, the price I must pay for it! That monster, Kemp, wishes to marry me. I shiver at the very sound of his voice. And yet I promised to marry him if he would avenge me on you. But I can destroy him and his case. I will do it for your sake, Norman."

"What! prove me the Earl of Leigh?"

"Yes."

"Then this case against my title is an infamous fabrication?"

"But can never be shown to be such unless I show it."

"Do so, and earn your reward, dear Helen."

"I cannot trust you," said Helen, weeping. "I adore you, but I do not believe you. Come with me. Let us go together to the Continent, and in six weeks' time I will teach you how to break down the case. I will not give you this knowledge until before all the world you have committed yourself to me."

"And if I refuse?"

"The case goes on; Hartington is Lord of Leigh."

"Consider, I have a wife and child."

"This course would retain for them titles and estates."

"And if I refuse and you ruin me, will it pay you to have secured revenge at the price of marriage with a man whom you hate as you do this Kemp?"

"Hark you! I will never, *never* be his wife! When I get my revenge, my payment will be other than my hand."

"Look you, Helen—he is rich. I will give you ten thousand pounds if you will break down this case, marry him, and go with him to Australia. I will get him a government position, acknowledge him as a step-brother, receive you both as my guests; you shall be married here. Let us be friends. Let us make these terms?"

"Never! *never!* NEVER!" said Helen, furiously. "Now, then, you shall lose all!"

"I will swear to this visit and your statements here."

"And I will fully prove an *alibi*, and break you down."

"I WILL NOT go with you, woman. I hate you so consumingly that the end would only be murder!"

CHAPTER LIV.

HE HELD THE PAPER AGAINST THE LIGHT.

The Leigh estates and the Leigh title had always been the objects of Colonel Hartington's strong desire. Doubtless Lady Clare Montessor would not have married the colonel had she not hoped that he would one day inherit from his younger but feebler distant cousin, Lord Norman Leigh. The birth of little Rupert had seemed to end these expectations forever, when the amazing information brought by Helen Hope had revived them, and wrought to its highest pitch assurance of immediate possession of the earldom.

The story was so simple and clear, the testimony so direct, narrow, and apparently conclusive, that Colonel Hartington entirely believed in it. Still, the colonel, as a man of the world and a man of business, was far from wishing to appear before the public as the dupe of a pair of knaves, or as eagerly grasping after a coronet firmly set on the head of its proper wearer; therefore, instead of proceeding to at once bring the Hartington vs. Leigh case into court, both parties and their legal advisers sifted and examined their case in

joint meetings at one or the other of the law offices, or at the private residence of Lord Keith. Such a meeting had been called at the library of Lord Keith, and the grave-digger and the stone-cutter had been brought from Ireland that their testimony might be heard in full council. Lord Keith and Mr. Storms were very hopeful, as they had made some discoveries which they trusted would discredit the claim brought by their adversaries.

Lord Keith had urged Norman Leigh to be present, and aid in sifting his own case; but this he entirely refused. Hopeless apathy seemed to possess him; he said he would do more harm than good—that the lawyers would be more acute than himself.

In spite of Adam's vigilance, he succeeded in getting both brandy and opium, in small quantities; and, shut in his private room, or his library, at the Towers, he gave himself up to gloom.

As he would not go to London, Violet went with her maid, nurse, and child, and a groom or two, and remained in her house by the Green Park, waiting for news.

At the hour of the conference, Lady Clare, in high excitement, betook herself to the morning room of her father's city mansion, expecting to be there met by the colonel, telling her that the testimony was overwhelming and invulnerable, and a decision must immediately be given in their favor.

When the door of Lord Keith's library opened to admit Kemp and the grave-digger, accompanied by Colonel Hartington, and the sexton saw that the four gentlemen who were seated at the table, were evidently lawyers, he drew back, declaring "he was trapped, and would not stay."

"Stay and stick to your testimony, or you'll hang," said Kemp, in his ear.

The fellow looked up, and recognizing in the tall, stately figure, which stood with folded arms and a resolute face, in the bow-window, Lord Keith, who had questioned him at Shields, became more restive, crying:

"I won't stop. I'll go any way."

"You cannot," said Mr. Storms; "the police are within call."

"What do you mean?" cried Kemp.

"Nothing unusual. We have strong reasons for believing that this story is a fabrication, to extort money, or

avenge private offenses. If so, we shall hand you both over to justice. Admit your fabrication while there is time."

"There is nothing to admit," said Kemp, resolutely.

Closely questioned, Kemp gave his story as before. Wells & Epston, for Colonel Hartington, then carefully examined the grave-digger; but he, recovering from his confusion, told a straight story, averring that he had been ordered to dig Mr. Kemp's grave, and as he began the work, had heard that the apparently dead man had revived, and after six months, he had really dug his grave, and buried him. "The records were at Shields, open to inspection, and he would swear to the doctor's statement."

"Why had such a statement been prepared?" asked Storms.

"Because the thing looked curious, the man's death having been put in the paper, on the first occasion, and to meet my questionings, the doctor made the written statement, and put it with the records. He would testify to the doctor's handwriting anywhere."

"That seems clear enough," said Mr. Epston to Lord Keith.

"We shall throw this man's testimony out of court, by showing that he is a criminal, guilty of robbery, and partaker in a murder of a jeweler's clerk in Dublin," said Mr. Storms, quietly.

The grave-digger fell on his knees, with a cry:

"Kemp! You've ruined me!"

Kemp took him by the collar, with a look of warning.

"We have here the stone-cutter who prepared the headstone for Kemp," said Mr. Storms; and a very decent, honest-faced man came from an inner room.

"Did you set up that grave-stone?" asked Mr. Epston.

"Yes; I can swear to the stone; I have it on my books, and I have been to see it, and it is my work."

"How did you get the order?"

"By letter; and it is so on my book for that year."

"Can you swear that the stone is as you made it, and has not been altered?" asked Epston.

"No; I cannot."

"Can you swear it has been altered?" demanded Storms.

"No; I cannot. The stone looks a little odd about the date. JAN. *might* have been changed to JUNE. It is a bit crowded. There are methods that could make a recent

alteration look as old as the rest of the stone. But again, it may be just as it was set up. It was a cheap stone—'prentice work on it, perhaps—I can't swear."

"But can you swear to the doctor's handwriting in the paper?" asked Colonel Hartington.

"Yes, I can. So can others—good witnesses. They have done it."

"When did the doctor die?"

"In '46. I set up his grave-stone."

"After all," said Mr. Epston to Storms, "the statement of the doctor is our strong point. The grave-digger you may prove a criminal, unworthy of credence; the stone-cutter is not prepared to take his oath that the inscription is as he made it, or that it is exactly as he received the order, as to date; he *thinks* he inscribed according to order, and *thinks* the stone is intact; but the doctor's statement, with this grave-digger's name, and the mark of the cottager at whose house Kemp died, as witnesses, will be held as sure proof of the revival and later death."

"Where is the cottage woman?" asked Mr. Storms.

"Dead," said Kemp.

"I'll swear to her mark," said the grave-digger.

Suddenly Lord Keith started forward:

"You, then, rest the case on this doctor's statement?"

"Yes," said Mr. Epston.

The colonel bowed.

"Will you allow me to take the paper a moment?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Epston, selecting the paper from his wallet.

The grave-digger and Kemp started, as if they thought the young peer would destroy the paper. The four lawyers smiled.

Lord Keith returned to the window and opened the inner blind to the full power of the afternoon sun. The next instant he gave a cry:

"Gentlemen, the case is ours! *The paper is forged!*"

The four lawyers and Colonel Hartington sprang up.

"Stay!" cried Keith. "Look here, I beg of you!"

He held the paper against the strong light, and across it ran, in broad water-line, the date of its manufacture, 1848.

"Two years after the death of the doctor who is claimed to have written it," said Keith, quietly.

"A forgery!" cried the four lawyers.

"I give up the claim!" said Hartington, firmly.

"I'll confess! I'll confess!" shrieked the grave-digger.

There was a heavy fall. Kemp lay senseless on the floor.

"Call in the police!" said Mr. Storms, serenely.

Lord Keith heeded no one. He rushed wildly from the room.

CHAPTER LV.

"YOU ARE THE TRUE LORD OF LEIGH."

Through the hall, seizing a soft hat that lay happily in sight, passed the tall footman, out into the street, bright and hot with the afternoon sun, dashed Lord Kenneth Keith. One thought filled his heart—he had saved to Violet's child his title and ancestral estates.

His strong, swift pace brought him in a few minutes' time to the Belgravian mansion, where he knew Violet waited to learn her boy's destiny. He knew he should find Violet in the conservatory.

The glass doors were all open to the summer air, a fountain slowly played and rippled in the center, and on the marble edge of the basin sat Violet, holding little Rupert.

A loud peal of the bell roused Violet. A step which she knew—oh, how well!—rang along the hall, and in the doorway, framed in creamy and crimson roses, stood Kenneth Keith, his face radiant with triumph, as some victor back from Paynim wars, to lay his trophies at his lady's feet.

"Kenneth!" cried Violet, springing up, catching the light of congratulation in his eye.

"You are safe, Violet!" cried Kenneth, darting toward her, as if to clasp both mother and child to his heart; then remembering and commanding himself, and taking the boy from her, and pressing her hand only for one instant in his.

"Your son shall be Lord of Leigh. The case is ended. The papers were forgeries; Colonel Hartington gives up his claim; he sees its fallacy. Mr. Kemp, senior, died when he was stated to have died at first; there was no rival; his widow was a true widow when she married the late Lord Leigh. All is over."

"Kenneth, I do not know how this has all come about;

but I feel sure that I shall learn that it is you who have defended and saved us. My boy shall know it when he is old enough to know anything, and he shall always love and honor you as the best of men."

"Violet, whatever is done for you, and yours, is a happiness for me," said Keith. But he knew it was not safe or well that in this hour of joy, and gratitude, and effusiveness they should remain together. Both their hearts were in their eyes.

"Leigh must hear of this," he said, "and he should hear it from you. The good news will rouse him up to better things. There is an hour for preparation, and you will reach the train, and be at the Towers before nightfall. Shall I give your orders?"

"Do, please," said Violet. "I will go and dress at once."

Yes, her boy was safe. His name, his heritage were his; and Violet, as she was whirled toward Sussex, felt that this must be joy and consolation enough for her.

Keith had telegraphed for her carriage to be in waiting, and she reached her sad home about eleven at night. Rupert was sleeping profoundly in Magery's arms, and was carried at once to his mother's room. A few servants were up waiting, and the halls and two or three rooms were dimly lit. Old Adam met her.

"All is well, Adam!" cried Violet, joyfully. "Where is your master? I must tell him."

"He has been in bed for a little, feeling ill, but he is not asleep."

Violet hurried to Lord Leigh's room. He seemed in a light slumber, and Violet sighed as she saw how worn, thin, and troubled was his face. Oh, if she could only make him better and happier!

She laid her hand on his shoulder, bending over him.

"Norman! Norman! wake up for a minute. I have good news for you!"

He opened his eyes dully for a moment, saying:

"Violet!"

"Yes, yes, it is Violet. Wake up. We are safe, Norman. Their papers are forged. There will be no contest of the title. You are the true Lord of Leigh. Colonel Hartington has given up the case. Our Rupert will some day be Earl of Leigh. You have a true title for our boy."

Leigh sat up, eager, alert, shook off his stupor, and seized her hand.

"Violet, is it true?"

"Quite true. I will tell you all, Norman."

"And Hartington drops the claim? The marriage was not illegal?"

"No, no; quite legal. You are the true Lord Leigh."

"Thank Heaven!" he cried, with fervor. "Now I can be a man; this black shadow is gone!"

"Quite gone, Norman. Now rouse yourself for good."

"I will, I will, indeed, Violet. Since I thought all was lost I have seen so many good things possible, if I were only the true Lord Leigh."

"Let them be possible now," said Violet, gently.

"I will. I promise you, Violet."

"Well, now, rest sweetly, and in the morning I will tell you all. And Mr. Storms will come up. Good-night."

CHAPTER LVI.

"I ALONE AM GUILTY."

But while Violet, Countess of Leigh, was hurrying toward Sussex, her heart filled with gladness at the good news brought her by Kenneth Keith, another journey was made by Helen Hope.

Mr. Storms, zealous beyond his orders from his client, appeared at the Golden Cross with a police officer and a warrant hastily procured, and Helen was taken into custody for complicity in a forgery.

Thus, while Violet went to her assured home, Helen was locked in a cell; Kemp and the Shields grave-digger being also assigned cells in the same prison.

At ten o'clock the next morning the three prisoners were taken before the magistrate at the Old Bailey. The hangers on of the court pressed forward with curiosity at sight of the three, so curiously assorted, the rugged Kemp, the villainous-looking grave-digger, and the handsome, refined woman.

Helen's head reeled and her cheeks burned with flame as she, with the others, entered the prisoners' box.

But before Helen had left her cell an angel of mercy had interceded for her.

Early in the morning Violet stood once more at the door of her husband's room.

"May I come in, Norman?" said the soft, sweet voice. And when he answered "yes" she entered.

"Norman," she said, "I have come to beg you to send a telegram to Mr. Storms, saying that you will not prosecute those—unhappy people. Lord Keith said they were given over to the police last night."

"They deserve it," said Leigh, sullenly.

"But we are often spared our deserts, Norman," said Violet, with a winning look. "Think how great mercy and good fortune have come lately to us; let us forgive these our enemies their trespasses, else how could we say our prayers?"

"And if we let them go, how can we sleep in peace?"

"Could you not make a condition that they leave the country, Norman? The man wants to go to his sheep-farm, of course. For that poor, hot-headed Helen, let us send her to America."

"Better transport her to New Guinea," said Leigh, roughly, turning his back.

"Oh, Norman! Consider that this woman loved you; and love covers a multitude of sins."

"And causes another multitude. Violet, let me alone!"

"Norman, I feel so sorry for her. She is unfortunate."

"She hates you heartily."

"Never mind that. I don't. Do telegraph, saying, 'Let them go.'"

"Hanging is too good for them!"

"Oh, Norman, think; deliberately, for your ends, you roused her love, and so you share her fault. Do forgive, and consider, if you will not pardon for mercy's sake, if you prosecute, this whole affair must come out; and if you let them go, the whole will be forgotten in a few months."

"There is much in that," said Leigh, slowly.

Violet snatched a card from the dressing-table, and wrote a line.

"Do let me send this:

"MR. STORMS—I refuse to prosecute.

LEIGH."

"Send it, and leave me in peace!" shouted Leigh, hiding his head under the counterpane.

Violet sent a groom on the fleetest horse to the telegraph office. Then she breathed freely, a vision of the unhappy Helen in prison could not longer torment her.

Meanwhile Helen, Kemp, and their wretched comrade, appeared for the preliminary hearing. The attorneys, Storms & Morton, had a clear case to charge against them. Nothing but commitment for trial at the next sessions seemed possible, when Kemp begged leave to speak.

"My lord," he said, in a broken voice, and with an earnest face; looking at the magistrate, "I take all the responsibility. I alone am guilty. The woman is entirely innocent. I told her the story, as true. I showed her the evidence. She was entirely deceived by me. She has acted sincerely in what she esteemed the interests of justice. Lay on me what penalty the law demands, but let her go. She is not my accomplice, but one of my victims. I persuaded her to go to the colonel, because as she believed thoroughly in this charge, I considered that the honesty of her statement would make it more effective. I was moved by hate and malice, because Lord Leigh treated me cavalierly, and would not receive me, and also because I thought that he did not regard my position as a man of means, at a time which it is needless to mention. I may defend myself on another plea when my case comes to trial, but I aver, now, that I prepared all this evidence, bought over the testimony of this precious rascal, and together we deceived Miss Hope. She is innocent! Let her go!"

Helen heard amazed. This man was sacrificing all to defend her, when she knew that she had urged him on in his attack, had forced him to continue it when he had earnestly entreated her to abandon it. She knew that he, at that instant, remembered how she had added to the testimony, strengthened its weak points, been cognizant all the time of its falsity, had been his instigator as well as his accomplice, and he stood now between her and doom, crying:

"I alone am guilty! She is innocent! Let her go!"

She burst into a passion of tears.

Kemp turned and snatched her to his bosom, his rugged face working convulsively. He cried:

"Helen, Helen! it is I, scoundrel that I am, that have brought you to this shameful pass!" and, bowing his head against hers, tears streamed down his cheeks.

At this instant a lad from the telegraph office pressed up

to Mr. Storms, and gave him a small yellow envelope. Mr. Storms read the dispatch.

"Lord Leigh refuses to prosecute, and requests the discharge of the prisoners," he whispered to the magistrate. "The man is subject to attacks of aberration, and no doubt the forgery is a result of such mental disturbance. We will post him back to his sheep-farm. No question but he is tired of London."

"The prisoners may be dismissed; there is no charge," said the magistrate.

The box was opened.

Kemp and Helen in silence passed from the dark arches of the Old Bailey to the sunny street. Silently they turned upon Ludgate Hill, and through St. Paul's church-yard, and into the great Cathedral of St. Paul. A few people were wandering about, looking at the monuments of England's illustrious dead. Under the mighty dome these two unhappy ones seemed lost and alone. They sat down on a low bench.

"Helen," said Kemp, "I love you. I have done all that I could to satisfy you. I know you do not care for me; but come with me; be my wife; I will make you rich; I will be your servant, your slave, live only for you. In Australia let us forget this cruel, hateful England."

Helen heard, as in a dream, the voice of Kemp. For her all possibilities of life in England seemed ended. Hope, passion, emotion, were dead within her. She hardly heeded his words, as, gathering courage from her silence, he went on to depict life in Australia, and to tell her what he would there do for her.

"We can get a marriage license," he said. "I have lived over a fortnight in one London parish, and that is residence. I will get it to-day. Let us be married in a week. This is Wednesday; let it be next Wednesday. Let us each cast a miserable past behind us, and go to better things. Will you, Helen?"

She bowed, in a dull, cold stupor.

"And will you have some money?" said Kemp, to whom plenty of money was the greatest good. "I will give you a blank check, and you shall fill it out, if it is for half I possess. Dress yourself like a queen, if you will, Helen."

She looked at him in a bewildered way. Why did this man love her so frantically, while the man she adored

scorned and hated her? Oh, what bliss to have heard such words from Norman Leigh! To be invited, not to an Australian farm, but to the splendors of Leigh Towers; to be, not a colonist's wife, but Countess of Leigh! Why was not that her fortune?

"And, Helen, we will go and buy whatever you want, in furniture or china, and send it to the ship. I will get our passage by the ship that sails on Saturday week."

"No, let us buy all in Australia," said Helen.

"We could not get there what is good enough for you."

"Anything is good enough for me; I am a wretched woman," said Helen, bitterly.

"To me you are an angel and a queen," said Kemp. "Let us go and buy a piano for you, and a guitar, and books. Do you want books? Let us forget these late terrible things. For me, I do not care. I have been used to the hard things of life, and to possess you will be my compensation for all. You will go to a hotel in Islington, where no one will know you. Come, let us go, Helen."

She went. Kemp seemed intent on weaning her heart from all her troubles, and fixing it on himself. He seemed to try to buy her affection. He purchased for her flowers, fruit, jewels; he secured a handsome room, and commended her to the landlady's care, saying they were to be married the next Wednesday, and sail soon for Australia. But deeper and heavier grew the apathy of Helen; she seemed in a maze of hopeless misery.

For Kemp, freed from the prosecution which had threatened him, and sure, as he trusted, of Helen, he returned to his condition of a shrewd, practical man. He invested his money, and he bought many things needed in his home and on his farm. No one could be more assiduous and devoted than he to Helen; but the more he pressed his attentions on her, the more sadly she shrank from him. He trusted that the long voyage would bring them nearer together; that new scenes would banish the memory of her mortification and sorrows.

On Tuesday morning he came to see her, and she said:

"Come to my room; I have something to show you;" and beckoned the landlady.

On the bed lay her bridal-dress, a white cashmere, with a little white velvet shoulder cape, and a small white velvet

bonnet. Beside it were a pair of shapely white kid shoes, white gloves, and a fine white kerchief.

"Indeed, it is most beautiful," said the landlady; "and, sir, you must bring her a white bouquet."

"When you see me again, I will be—in these clothes," said Helen, touching them gravely.

"And tell me what white flowers to bring you," said Kemp.

"Tuberoses," said Helen.

"No, never tuberoses," said the landlady; "roses, lilies."

"Roses for the happy, lilies for the pure; but yet bring tuberoses for me," Helen said to Kemp.

"Just what you wish," said Kemp, warmly.

But for all that Helen had hinted that they were to meet only at the church next day, Kemp could not resist coming in the evening to ask for her.

"She has gone out," said the landlady. "She left a note in case you called for her. Here it is."

Kemp opened the note.

"MR. KEMP—There is one friend I must take leave off, and I have gone to say good-by. HELEN."

"Well, till to-morrow," said Kemp, disconsolately.

The morning of Helen Hope's wedding-day dawned. It was a peerless day. The sun sifted down hotly through the branches, and struck out the resinous odors from the pine and spruce and cedar. It fell in little glints, dappling the dark surface of the fatal Black Pool. The heat oppressed Lord Norman Leigh as he dashed through the narrow wood-paths to "The Earl's Folly."

A little lad had brought him a note:

"LORD LEIGH—You have one or two old letters of mine, that I must have back. Bring them to me at once at "The Earl's Folly," but tell no one." EDNA AMBROSE."

He never stopped to think that nothing would have induced the pure and dignified Edna to write him a note, or summon him to a meeting. He only madly fancied that he should see her there; might hear once more the melody of her voice; look into the depths of her serene blue eyes. The letters were a mere nothing—two little notes of girlish friendship. Edna herself had long ago forgotten them;

and if she had remembered them, she would not have cared to ask them back.

Too mad to consider such an improbability, the Lord of Leigh hurried to "The Earl's Folly"—his ancestor's folly and his own. With eager steps he bounded up the stairs to the room in the second story. There, in the center of the floor, stood Helen Hope in her bridal array.

He stopped astounded as at a vision. Helen was as pallid as the dead; dark circles of sleeplessness and sorrow were under her large, burning, long-lashed eyes. Her black hair lay in thick waves between the white velvet of her bonnet and the marble whiteness of her brow. Her face was full of a supreme anguish and despair, and yet never had Helen been so regally beautiful.

"Norman," she said, "it is my wedding-day."

"Then why are you here, Helen?" he cried, desperately.

"To take leave of you, Norman."

"Is it to be at this parish church, Helen? I had not heard. Come, let the past perish. Shall I go with you, and give away the bride at the altar?"

"Could you do it, Norman?"

"Indeed, yes—gladly, Helen."

"Then, once for all—you never loved me?"

"No, no! I have told you so a hundred times. Why bring up that folly? Come, let us go."

"Yes, I go, not to life, but to death—not to a waiting lover, but to the waters of the Black Pool!"

One window of the room opened to the floor upon a little open platform that overhung the pool.

She sprang upon this, looked back, waved her hand.

"You are guilty of my death. They will search for me, and Kemp will charge you with my murder. The boy knows you came here at my call. *Revenge is sweet!*"

He could not let her perish so, and springing out, he clasped her waist to drag her back. But Norman Leigh was not an athletic man, while Helen Hope was a vigorous woman, in the mighty passion of despair. She locked her two strong arms about his neck, and crying, "I said you should live for me, or die with me!" carried him down with her under the fatal waters of the Black Pool.

CHAPTER LVII.

"I WANT MY PROMISED BRIDE."

On that glorious morning of the parting summer, while Norman Leigh hurried to his doom, Violet was in the nursery, seated by the porcelain tub wherein Magery was giving that laughing cherub, Rupert, his daily bath. Admiring the health and enjoyment of the child, Violet forgot her troubles, and while the subdued sadness never left her eyes, the dimples returned to her cheeks, and smiles curved her lovely mouth, answering to the shouting mirth of the babe.

To Violet, Rupert seemed the most lovely thing on earth, and when the child was dressed she had Jenny go with her and carry him to Lord Leigh's dressing-room. Not finding Norman there, she went to the library and the billiard-room. They were alike empty. The bell pealed for breakfast, and, after waiting for a while, Violet breakfasted alone.

An undefined dread and uneasiness hung over her, and as the morning hours passed she sent Kate to make inquiries, and found that one of the gardeners had seen Lord Leigh walking early on the terrace, and had sent to him a lad who came with a note.

"He has been called off by the steward," thought Violet.

But when lunch-time came, and no Lord Leigh, old Adam, sharing his lady's disturbance, tottered off to "The Earl's Folly" to seek his master. The little building was empty. There was no trace of Lord Leigh there.

Luncheon had been over for an hour when Mr. Storms arrived. Violet met him, saying:

"Lord Leigh went out before breakfast, and has not yet returned."

"He appointed this afternoon, at three, for a consultation with me. I sent him a telegram yesterday that I should be here promptly, as I have little spare time. He wished me to draw up his will."

"What is that for?" asked Violet, uneasily. "Is he ill?"

"I think he is not taking good care of himself, and there are some things from which, no doubt, your influence will wean him, Lady Leigh," said the lawyer, who could not but know many of the mysteries of Leigh's life. "You know he was threatened with dangerous illness lately, and I renewed my arguments with him to make his will and appoint guardians for his heir in case anything happened. It was only justice to you and the child. He has been very averse to mentioning a will, but has finally agreed. I shall not leave here now until it is drawn up."

"He will surely be back by dinner-time," said Violet, and left Mr. Storms to enjoy himself in the gardens and library until Lord Leigh's return.

But the countess and the lawyer ate dinner together at sunset, and no master of the house had come, and both were seriously uneasy.

After dinner, they went to the library. Violet kept her child up as long as she dared, for its innocent presence comforted her unrest.

About nine, the bell clanged loudly.

"He has come!" cried Violet, starting up.

But a high, fierce voice was heard in the hall.

"Where is Lord Leigh?"

"He has been from home all day—we do not know where," replied the footman.

"It is a lie! He is here! He sits gloating over his evil work! Peer or beggar, I'll have his life for it!"

Mr. Storms sprang up and rushed into the hall. There, with disordered garments, face and hair dripping with perspiration from his hurried movements, stood Bart Kemp.

"You here, Kemp? What now?" cried Mr. Storms.

"I want my wife, my promised bride, and I'll have her! Right is on my side now, and I'll claim it, even if you are here to screen the peer's iniquities."

"Oh, what is it?—what do you mean?—who are you?—for whom are you looking?" cried Violet, pressing forward.

In all his excitement, Bart Kemp recognized the power of her gentle, winsome beauty.

"Who are you, lady?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"I am the Countess of Leigh," said Violet, gently.

"I wouldn't ever have done what I did, if I had seen you first," said Kemp, looking at her with honest admira-

tion. "But now it's I who am right. He has you, and why can't he let her, my bride, alone?"

"Will you not tell us what you mean, and of whom you are speaking?" said Violet, gently still, but trembling very much.

"I'm speaking of Lord Norman Leigh, your husband, and of Helen Hope, who promised to marry me in church this morning at eleven o'clock. Where is she?"

"But how can we tell?" interposed Mr. Storms. "We have not seen her. Why do you come here for her?"

Kemp took from his pocket a crumpled note, and held it toward Violet, his hand shaking as with palsy, in his strong agitation. Violet read:

"I am going to 'The Earl's Folly' to see Norman Leigh. If I do not return, seek me there.
HELEN HOPE."

Violet stood silent, motionless, as if, like Niobe, smitten into stone in her despair.

"I waited at the church," cried Kemp, frantically; "she did not come; and this afternoon I received this. I want my bride. Where is she? Has he murdered her?"

Violet made no sound, but life and color left her face, and she fell forward, senseless, as she leaned toward Kemp, holding still that fatal note.

The man caught her in his arms. Pity moved his rugged heart.

"Poor little soul, this is hard for her," he muttered, and strode into the library and laid her on a sofa, while Mr. Storms rang for help.

Adam, with some of the other servants, had come at the confusion, and a few words from the footmen in the hall told him the trouble. Mr. Storms showed him the note which he had taken from the hand of the fainting countess.

"He is not there. I looked for him there—this afternoon," said Adam.

"You are all leagued to hide her—to deceive me," shouted Kemp.

"Hush!" said Mr. Storms. "You will find we are all leagued to ferret out this affair at once. Believe me, the woman is far more dangerous than the man. Adam, call two of the gardeners, and a keeper and a groom; those four, with Kemp and myself, will search the park and the vicinity of 'The Folly.' Get torches and lanterns."

In a little while, they went out to the search. All the household was astir.

Mr. Storms, questioning the young gardener as to the boy seen in the morning, sent a footman for the lad, and at midnight came back with Kemp to see the boy in the library. Violet, recovered from her swoon, had refused to go to her rest, and the pallid agony of her face mocked the rich beauty of her attire, as she waited in the library.

"Did you bring a message to Lord Leigh, boy?" asked Mr. Storms.

"A bit of a note from a lady. She met me nigh the wood."

"How did she look?" demanded Kemp, fiercely.

"She was tall and handsome, pale as the dead, and all in white, like a bride to a weddin'," said the boy.

"Helen! Helen!" groaned Kemp.

"And what did she say?" asked the lawyer.

"'Fly to Lord Leigh with that, and let no one else see it.' And then she turned and walked quick in the cedar wood."

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE LORD OF LEIGH FOR THE LAST TIME CAME HOME.

Again, with renewed numbers, the search went on. At three Mr. Storms came in, and said that as soon as the day was clear they would drag the Black Pool. He had sent to the family physician to come at once, fearing for Violet, and desiring also the testimony and presence of the physician in case their worst fears were realized.

Day dawned, and, sleepless and haggard, Violet Leigh watched from the eastern windows the brightening of the primrose sky to red and gold. She had heard the tread of many feet, as carrying canoes and drags, the men went by to search out the secrets of the Black Pool. The servants hung about in little groups, faces awe-struck and wan. Of all the household only the babe was in tranquil rest.

The sun was well up when the boats were put out on the pool. As they touched the water some one called attention to a certain thing caught in a low branch at the most distant point of the pool. They rowed thither and found a

light felt hat known to be Lord Leigh's. In silence the two boats parted at this point, and moved in opposite directions around the pool, to meet the level, open spot near "The Folly," where stood, Kemp, Adam, and Mr. Storms.

When almost the entire circuit had been made with the drags, not far from "The Folly," there was a resistance; the drags of one boat caught some heavy object, and both boats came together. In breathless, terrified silence they drew slowly, slowly from the black depths their prey.

A whiteness gleamed under the turbid water; then, closely clasped together, two still forms—a woman, all in snowy white, a man in a light woolen suit, heavy with water. Her arms were clinched fast about his neck; his right arm held about her waist, but his left hand, as she dragged him down, had instinctively grasped the first thing it touched, and that, alas! the strong, tough roots of plants at the bottom of the Pool, and as he held fast to these in his death-grip, the doomed pair had not risen even once to the surface when they fell.

They brought the bodies in, and loosening the enwrapped arms, laid them side by side upon the sward; and Lord Leigh was stretched at Adam's feet; and Helen, cold and still, lay before her bridegroom.

Kemp knelt down and touched the bridal garments.

"She said, when I saw her again it should be in these," said he; "and she has come, my bride, but not at the altar. He has murdered her!"

"No, Kemp; she has revenged herself on him, and drawn him with her to her death. See this!" said Mr. Storms, taking from Lord Leigh's vest-pocket a note, the corner of which had protruded, and carefully unfolding it on his palm. "See here! She has summoned him here, and under a false name and plea, to insure his coming. She sought him, and not he her, in that fatal hour."

"That's the lady, and that's the note," said a voice.

At the head of the two bodies stood the urchin who had been Helen's last messenger.

"She meant to die with him," said Kemp to Mr. Storms.

"Yes; no doubt."

"She never loved me, but—I loved her!" said the man, bursting into a vehement passion of grief.

The other men fell back, with the respect due to anguish,

and indulged him for a little space, as he knelt by the woman he had loved, and smoothed the wet hair from her brow, and called her by her name, and touched her dank bridal array.

"We must take them to the house," said Mr. Storms.

The men lifted two of the lower shutters of "The Folly" from their hinges. Over one they laid a lion-skin rug, and on the other a leopard skin. Then on each improvised bier they laid a cold, still form, with water slowly streaming from its garments, and through the narrow aisles of the cedar wood they took their way with their burden.

Some had run before, and the news had spread.

"They are found!" "Both together!" "Dead!" "Drowned in the Black Pool!"

These were the fragments of news that reached the house, and which they meant to keep from the ears of the young Countess of Leigh.

But she heard them, as such things are ever heard. She heard the cries of horror, the bursts of weeping, the smothered warnings of silence. It was only what she had been sure would come. She had known well, since midnight, how it would end. She knew by what way, at the avenue facing the great entrance of her princely home, they would bring its dead lord in; and, wan and trembling, out into the wide sunshine went Violet, Countess of Leigh, widowed, and alone.

Young and forlorn as she was, and looked, there was a new dignity and resolve about her that made her first in the scene, and suffered no remonstrances, as with set face and folded arms, she stood upon the marble steps of the entrance, where the Leigh lions, asleep in stone, creuched on either hand.

The rector had heard of the search and had come over early, and he and the doctor stood near, behind the young countess, as she waited for her dead.

And thus, slowly carried, drenched and rigid with open unseeing eyes, and clenched hands, Norman Leigh came for the last time to his ancestral home.

Slowly up the broad steps came the men, carrying the first bier, where the face of the dead had been covered with Adam's kerchief.

Then the bearers of the second bier stood still.

"What shall be done with the woman's body?"

"Bring her in," said the young countess, in a firm, low tone; "one cannot refuse hospitality to the dead."

Mr. Storms passed first—and arm in arm Adam and Kemp followed, each the ruin of his hope—the idol of his life.

They laid the bodies down in the billiard-room, and then the rector, taking Violet's hand and drawing her to him as if she were his child, said, while tears rained over his white beard and wrinkled cheeks:

"Dear child, your work for him is ended. You have still your boy; come to him."

And bowed above the cradle of her babe, the overwrought heart of Violet Leigh found the relief of tears.

"She cannot be alone so, poor, friendless little heiress that she has always been," said Mr. Storms. pityingly. "We must send for some one. For her aunts?"

"If I might be so bold," said Kate. "I suppose the relations must be sent for, but Lady Burton and Miss Haviland are the ones that can comfort her, and no others."

Shut alone in her room, Violet passed that horrible day. The coroner's inquest was held, the preparations for the burial went on.

Henry Ainslie, and his wife, and the Earl of Montessor, and Colonel Hartington, were summoned, but Violet saw no one until another day dawned, and a swift step passed up the stair, and Kate gave a cry of joy, as she opened the door of her lady's room, and Edna Haviland folded the forlorn little widow to her bosom. Held in those strong, fond arms, soothed by that sweet, loving voice, she who had learned to console, having had many sorrows of her own in her young, innocent life, brought the balm of comfort to the wounded heart of Violet.

Only a little over two years had the tragedy of her wretched married life lasted. With its pains and its pathos, it had ended now in darkness. Violet was as one exhausted, nearly lost, worn from hard battle with a stormy sea, cast at last into shelter, but conscious only as yet of the loss and the storm. But finally, in the arms of Edna, she sank into restful slumber.

CHAPTER LIX.

"IN DEATH UNDIVIDED."

In those dark days Edna was the light and stay of the household at the Towers. Mrs. Ainslie, kind-hearted and helpless, could only weep and lament; Lady Burton, at Violet's entreaty, took her place in the household, and Violet remained in her suite of rooms, with Edna and Rupert, seeing the members of the family only for a few minutes each day, as they came to inquire for her health.

The astuteness of Mr. Storms had suggested a plausible reason for the appearance of Lord Leigh at "The Folly;" and his view that the earl lost his life in the effort to keep Helen Hope from throwing herself into the Pool gained general credence.

Leigh had been an earl; he was dead; good reasons both for checking evil speech about him. Words cannot tell the relief of Violet, in finding that no ill-reports were to be rife of him whose name she bore, and who was the father of her child.

On the second day Helen Hope was quietly buried in the church-yard near Leigh Towers. Kemp insisted that she should be buried in her bridal-dress, and he placed in her cold hand a bouquet of tuberose.

"She asked for them, and she shall have them," he said; and he followed poor Helen, her sole but sincere mourner.

That evening Violet sent for him to come to her boudoir.

"I learn that you are going to Australia?"

"Yes, to-day week. I'll never see England more."

"You are very unhappy," said Violet, in her soft, gentle voice. "I can feel for you, for I know what unhappiness is. And I have learned, too, that when we are unhappy we get the most comfort in trying to be good."

"My lady, how can you think to try and comfort me, when you know I was like to rob you and him?"

He pointed to the child, sleeping in his cradle.

"We are told to forgive our enemies," said Violet.

"I've had a hard life and a rough one," said Kemp; "but I will be a better man from this out, for your sake."

"You have energy and money, and can do much good if you will, and that will soothe your sorrows," said Violet.

"I promise you, my lady, I will be another man."

"Here is a seal ring that was my father's," said Violet. "Will you wear it in memory of the promise, and if you can help poor orphans and foundlings with your money, do it, for poor Helen's sake."

Kemp went softly from her presence, as if he had left a sanctuary.

It was the night before the day set for the funeral. The various members of the mourning household had gone to their rooms, when a wild cry rang through the Towers, followed by long wails.

Violet heard it in her boudoir, where, still dressed, she was trying to catch an hour's sleep in an easy-chair. Her heart at once awoke to terror for her child. What had happened to Rupert?

She flew to the nursery. It was empty; but the sounds of lamentation had roused Rupert, who was struggling to lift himself in his cradle. Relieved of anxiety for him, Violet caught him in her arms, and, as the wails still continued, she ran in excitement down the stairs.

The door of the great, black-hung drawing-room was open, the coffin of Lord Norman lay under the dimly lit chandelier in the center. At its head knelt old Adam; beside him stood Magery, wringing her hands and crying wildly, while the servants were grouped about. As the little countess, in her deep mourning robe, holding the child, in his little white night-gown, crossed the threshold, Kate hastened to her, and took the child from her.

"Don't come here, my lady dear. It is no place for you. He is dead."

"I know he is dead," said Violet, tears welling in her eyes.

"I don't mean my lord, dear lady. It is Adam—old Adam—whom we found dead, kneeling there by my lord. His heart broke for his master, poor man."

"Adam dead!" said Violet, in an awed tone. Then, releasing her hold of the child, she went up to Magery, and clasped her wrinkled hands tenderly, saying: "Come with me, poor Magery. We have been bereaved together; let us go weep together, and comfort each other. Adam has died by his master, and he shall be buried by him."

She turned, and saw her uncle, Henry Ainslie, entering the room.

"Uncle," she said, "give orders to have Adam buried with Lord Leigh, and let his coffin be placed in the Leigh vault, at his lord's feet. He has followed him all his life; he shall lie with him in death."

It was graciously thought and said, and brought the first ray of consolation to poor Magery.

Next day they buried Lord Norman and his faithful servant. A long, pompous train followed the magnificent bier, and laid Norman Leigh beside his fathers.

As swallows fly from the frosts, and orioles vanish in the train of summer, so guests fly from the house of sorrow as soon as funeral rites are finished.

Colonel Hartington and Lady Clare were first to go. With Clare went the Montréssor kin, and Mrs. Ainslie departed next.

Henry Ainslie tarried a little longer than his wife.

"Some arrangements must be made for you, Violet," he said. "Your husband made no will, appointed no guardians. I don't know just what you are to do."

"I mean to stay here, and bring up my son on his estates among his own people, to be a good earl," said Violet. "Edna will be with me much, and I shall write to the Lord Chancellor to appoint Rupert's guardians and our trustees. He will."

"I think that is good sense," said Uncle Henry. "And Storms and the steward can advise you about the estates."

He brightened visibly when he found he need not be guardian, and took leave of his niece, protesting that she was developing into a wonderful little woman.

Violet wrote to the Lord Chancellor, who was laid up with gout at his London house.

And now all the guests were gone but Edna. The family at the Towers were all in deep black, but the black hangings were removed, and the doors and windows were open to the sun and the fragrance of fruit and flowers.

It was a late September morning, and Violet and Edna were seated together in a charming little room overlooking the gardens, when a servant entered with two letters, one from the Lord Chancellor, and one from Kenneth Keith.

The letter from the Lord Chancellor lay uppermost; and, as Violet took it from the salver, she did not notice the su-

perscription of the other letter, which she dropped into her lap. She cried, eagerly:

"Now, Edna, we shall hear what he says. Oh, I hope he has appointed wise and good guardians for my boy!"

"I am sure he has," said Edna, dropping her work. "He would not do otherwise, as he is a wise and good man."

Violet began to read aloud. After some general condolences, and compliments, and explanations, that he would have come to her at the Towers, had he not been a prisoner to the gout, the Lord Chancellor went on to say:

"You have committed to me a very important trust, that of selecting suitable guardians for the heir of one of the oldest titles and finest estates in England. Your child will have a long minority, over twenty years. It is necessary that I should not appoint old men for his guardians, but those who may hope to see him attain his majority. I would desire men of large, liberal, kindly natures, who would have sympathy with their ward, and obtain his love and confidence. I should seek men of lofty ideas, pure lives, unsullied integrity, examples to him of all the virtues they should inculcate. I have thought deeply upon the choice of these, my ideal guardians; but, high as is the standard I have set, I think I have chosen men who attain to it. I have spoken to them, and they have agreed to accept the trust. They are the Marquis of Alwood and Lord Kenneth Keith."

Violet dropped the letter, and the two young women looked at each other across the fatherless babe, who, unconscious of the questions at stake, lay on the floor between them, playing with a gold coral and bells. A flood of crimson rose over Edna's fair face and throat, at this unexpected encomium and mention of the man she deeply loved. Violet grew paler still, in contrast with her crape, and under the widow's cap, which hid all the shining rings of her pretty hair. She turned her eyes to Rupert, and said, softly:

"I know Lord Keith loves the child. He said he would always be his friend; and he saved him his estate."

"No doubt it is a good choice," said Edna, taking up her work again, and making various sudden resolutions, as she sewed little stitches.

"Certainly I cannot dispute the selection, and I never thought of his making such," said Violet. Then she laid down the Lord Chancellor's letter, and noticed the other.

"Here is one from Lord Keith," she said, breaking the seal. She read aloud:

"TO THE HONORABLE COUNTESS OF LEIGH—DEAR MADAM: The Lord Chancellor has appointed me one of the guardians of your son, the infant Earl of Leigh, and I have found myself unable to resist the urgency with which he pressed the office upon me. I trust I shall fulfill my duties for the child's good, and to your contentment. Lord Alwood, my co-guardian, has been called to Scotland; and, as it is necessary to confer with you on the proper plans for the future, I propose to wait on you at the Towers next week. I shall trespass but two days on your solitude. My mother sends her tenderest regards, and begs that you will receive her, with me, as she is longing to see both you and Miss Haviland. Your humble servant,

"KENNETH KEITH."

Violet had not seen Keith when he came to the Towers for the funeral. She had parted from him at the railroad station in London, after he had won her case for her. But the solemn days which had passed since then, and the terrible tragedy which had fallen upon her life, seemed to divide her, by years, from the girl whom Kenneth Keith had loved and mourned. Her future and her present were all for her child.

It was in this mood that, when Kenneth Keith came with his mother, she moved to meet him, a pathetic little figure, in her widow's cap and weeds. The rector and Mr. Storms were also there, and Violet asked the rector to give her his arm to dinner, while Kenneth escorted his mother.

When they returned from the brief and silent meal, Kenneth said:

"Lady Leigh, I wished to confer with you and Mr. Storms, as I am about to leave England for some time. My little ward will scarcely need much of my care at present, and my co-guardian, the marquis, can perform all the duties that might fall to either of us. I think the little earl will suffer no detriment from my absence. I am going to India and China, and probably shall be away two years."

Violet did not know that she had been shrinking from the future, and from meeting Lord Keith, until the sudden leap of relief which her heart gave at hearing he was going from England. She looked up at him almost gratefully, as she said, "She did not wish his guardianship to be a bur-

den," and that "she was sure Lord Alwood could give all the advice needed."

"Our little earl will want no more important tutors than a nursery maid during the next two years," laughed Mr. Storms.

Violet slid her hand into that of Lady Burton, and whispered:

"Since you will be alone now you will spend a deal of your time with me, will you not, and teach me how to manage my child and my estates? If you stay much with me I can have Edna here more."

Lord Keith and Lady Burton went away in two days, and then, for October, life flowed on very quietly at the Towers.

One day in November Violet went to Edna's room with an open letter.

"Dearest Edna, I must tell you, the Marquis of Alwood is coming here, day after to-morrow, to see his ward."

"Then, Violet," said Edna, quietly, "to-morrow I must leave you. I go to my cousin's."

CHAPTER LX.

"CRUEL, CRUEL THE WORDS I SAID."

That night, when Edna had dismissed her maid and was seated in a low chair before the fire in her dressing-room, Violet came to her. Her brown hair, freed from the widow's cap, fell in all its beautiful abundance over her shoulders, and her long black dressing gown made her look more slender and childish than ever.

"I am glad," she said, "that your maid is gone, and that you have no light but the fire. I want to talk to you."

Edna, without reply, took her hand and stroked it.

"May I speak to you of Alwood, Edna?"

"No," said Edna, "not of him."

"But I must. Bear with me, my loved Edna. You know that my life has been sacrificed to a mistake and an unkind interference. I do not mean ever to refer to it again. I wish forever to forget what tears I have shed, what heart-aches I have suffered. But my own Edna, I cannot endure

the thought of such mistakes for you. Edna do you still love Alwood?"

"I am not changeable, Violet," said Edna, looking at her friend between a smile and a tear.

"Darling Edna," said Violet, in her most caressing tone, "surely you will not be so unkind as to leave me alone here to receive Lord Alwood. You know it is not for my own sake I am speaking. I feel sure if you two were to meet the old good terms would at once be established between you. The happiness of you both is at stake. Oh, it is a sad thing to part true lovers, my Edna."

"Urge me no more," said Edna. "I cannot see him; all my peace, my dignity, my womanly self-respect are at stake. I know if I met him I could not so command myself, but some look or tone must show that my heart is his. You know, Violet, how many there would be to say the poor rector's child was seeking Alwood for his lofty rank, and loved the title rather than the man. I cannot lay myself open to any such suspicion by throwing myself in his way. All is ended between us."

"But there is a mistake between you, I am sure."

"It is not for me to right it," said Edna, and the leaping firelight showed her lovely blue eyes full of tears. "And now listen to me, Violet, promise me that you will not speak of me—to him."

"I cannot do that, for I should break my promise," said Violet; "everything would recall you, and I could hardly avoid mentioning your name."

"At least promise me that you will not inquire into the trouble between us."

"Yes, I can promise that. I do not know Alwood well enough to intrude on his private affairs."

But Violet believed that she knew what the trouble was, and she set her loving heart and earnest mind at work to try and find a way to right the wrong done by her dead husband.

The next day Edna went to her cousin near Hackney. Her going from the Towers was as a light withdrawn.

Lord Alwood arrived just in time to dress for dinner. After dinner his little ward was brought to the drawing-room, and then Lord Alwood had a long talk about the estates, and how they should be conducted during the little earl's minority.

Violet was seated on a low chair near the fire that leaped in the grate. Her black robes fell heavily about her, her white cap made the one strong point of light, as with her lovely child-like face turned aside, she watched Alwood while he studied a portrait which was set up on a table near him. She could not doubt that he loved Edna deeply still, when she saw how pale he grew, and how a mist swept over his eyes, and a look of longing and despair settled over his handsome face. He turned and caught her gaze. He strove to speak indifferently.

"Miss Haviland has been keeping you company?" he said, coming and leaning his elbow on the jade mantel, and looking down at the countess.

"Yes. I cannot tell you what she has been to me. I think ours is such a love as Tennyson celebrated in 'In Memoriam,' more than the love of kindred. And yet, do you know, once I had the deepest and most unreasoning aversion toward Edna."

"Ah?" said the marquis, softly.

"Yes. But it was all owing to a mistake. No one could be angry with Edna, nor condemn her, except as under a mistake, because she is the most perfect creature on earth. Well, I mistook her, and disliked her, and refused to meet her, and she returned me good for evil, and love for hate, and saved me for myself, and if I have been strong at all, and have done my duty, it is all owing to Edna."

"She is fortunate in having so warm a friend," said the marquis.

"Would you imagine me of a jealous nature, Lord Alwood?"

"I do not know. But if you are, I think I could sympathize with the infirmity, as I possess it."

"It leads us into many mistakes, and often causes us to destroy our own happiness and the happiness of others, and to condemn the innocent," said Violet, quietly, and then turned the conversation to business channels.

The next morning, before breakfast, Lord Alwood was strolling about in the park, when he came upon a little rustic seat under a beech tree, and there lay an open book, and on it a kerchief and a withered cluster of pansies. The handkerchief had Edna's name on it. She had inadvertently left the things there some thirty-six hours be-

fore. The book was Tennyson's Poems, and Lord Alwood read:

"Cruel, cruel, the words I said,
Cruelly came they back to-day.
'You are too slight and fickle,' I said,
'To trouble the heart of Edwin Gray.'"

All during breakfast Lord Alwood seemed lost in deep meditation. After breakfast he and Violet went to the library to look over papers.

When the papers had been examined Lord Alwood spoke, abruptly:

"You say you mistook Ed——, Miss Haviland, and disliked her; would you mind telling me about it?"

"There is no reason why I should not tell you. I heard that she had been engaged to Lord Leigh, and I believed he continued to care for her, and I was angry and jealous."

"Well, was she not engaged to him?"

"No."

"Can you not tell me about it, Lady Leigh? I, too, have heard of this, and perhaps not a true account."

"But, if you were interested, why did you not ask Edna?"

"I did."

"What did you ask her? If there had been an engagement?"

"Why, I asked if he had been her lover."

"You see, there is a vast difference," said Violet, quietly.

"Did you ask her to explain?"

"No. I was jealous and hasty, and asked for a 'yes or no,' and when it was 'yes,' I went into a rage."

"Then you *were* very foolish," said Violet, calmly.

Lord Alwood leaned his head on his hand, and sighed deeply. Violet remembered how her own life had been blighted by misunderstandings, and she pitied him. He was, in spite of his admitted hastiness, a good and noble man, and he had had his lesson. She bent forward.

"Lord Alwood, let me tell you that story. Edna's aunt lives by our park gates, and Lord Leigh saw Edna there, when she was scarcely sixteen, and fell in love with her."

Then she told how he had followed her into Cornwall, and succeeded in meeting her, and had seemed much in love, had really been enamored, and how Edna had at

once told all to her father; and the wise old man, feeling sure that his child's fleeting fancy, and not her heart, was enlisted, had insisted on a year of probation and parting.

She told the little story simply, earnestly, frankly, with delicate tact, and tried to hide the truth—that Lord Leigh had not loved herself, had pursued Edna, and Edna had used all her power to try and comfort and help her, and make peace between her and Leigh; she also told how Edna had comforted and encouraged her. Thus Violet told her friend's story.

“You think, then, she did not love this first lover?”

“I know she did not. Here was a girl's heart, faintly stirred by first words of love, which did not waken any real or strong emotion. And then the acquaintance was of the slightest—a few meetings, with the governess or her father for a third.”

“I never loved but one,” said Lord Alwood, “and that one—Edna. I have always said I could marry only a woman who loved me, first, last, only. I could have the ghost of no dead loves rising in my married life. A coquette is a being whom I abhor. I believe marriage should be made on the simple basis of honest love. I felt sure that Lord Leigh could not have been truly congenial to Edna, and if there had been a long engagement, it was all on the ground of social advantage. I admit I was rash, hasty, jealous, unjust. She ought to hate me, and, no doubt, she does.”

Violet was silent. She took up a paper covered with calculations of certain interest, and knit her pretty brows, as she studied it with zeal.

“Do you think I might have another chance?” he asked.

“I think you owe her ample and sincere apology,” said Violet, with admirable frankness.

“She shall have it. Where shall I find her?”

Violet still continued to study figures. Finally she lifted her sweet face.

“Lord Alwood, I have such a plan!”

“Of a school-house?” asked the marquis, gloomily.

“No. Hark a minute. This is my plan.”

She bent forward, and talked earnestly. As she spoke Lord Alwood's face brightened like the morning.

"You are my best friend," he said. "I owe you everything, all my devotion, how shall I ever repay you?"

"Pay the debt to my boy," said Violet, quietly.

"And it shall really be this way?"

"Yes. I think it will work to a charm," said Violet.

His lordship looked another man from that minute.

He wore a most radiant face when he drove off to the station.

Now, about the middle of December, Violet wrote to Lady Burton, begging that she and Edna would come to the Towers, to pass the holidays there quietly.

Lady Burton and Edna arrived on the twentieth and fell readily into their places in Violet's quite household life.

On the evening of the twenty-fourth, Violet, in a furred cloak and hood, was, just before twilight, pacing the terrace, looking down the avenue, as if watching for some one. She did not seem at all surprised when Lord Alwood rode up, followed by a groom on horseback.

The groom led off the horse, and Alwood, with his cloak over his arm, went up the broad steps by Lady Leigh's side.

"I peeped into the library just now, through the shutters," said Violet, "and Edna is sitting there alone by the fire. You shall go in at once, if you like."

She knocked at the library, then pushed open the door. Lord Alwood entered, and the door swung shut softly.

The library was in a ruddy twilight of the hearth-fires and the dying day. Edna was leaning back in a low bamboo chair, her lovely head against the tufted blue satin cushions, her white dress falling in a soft cloud about her, the leaping flame touching robe and hair with points of gleaming gold. Lord Alwood moved softly forward:

"Miss Haviland! Edna!" he said, in a low tone.

She made no answer. He drew nearer; he could see her face now. Her hands lay loosely in her lap; the long, dark lashes swept her delicate cheeks. Edna was asleep, and her dimples went and came, and her lips curved, as in a happy dream.

Alwood knelt beside her chair, and said, gently:

"Edna, Edna, wake!"

She opened her eyes; he seemed to so mingle with her

dream that she did not wonder at seeing him there. The soft light of her beautiful smile shone into his heart.

"Edna," he said, "behold a penitent here for pardon. I make a full confession. I was hasty, hard, unkind; I deserve only your indignation. But I love you with all my heart. I lay my life at your feet. Only your love can make me happy. Edna, will you forgive me? Will you be my wife?"

A rosy flush dawned over her fair face and neck.

"Alwood! Are you really here? Is it not a dream?"

"Make it the most blessed reality that ever was by saying that you love me."

"I'm afraid you'll think better of it," said Edna, with a most bewitching smile.

"So I shall, every day I live!" cried Alwood, folding her in his arms.

The loud peal of a bell roused these lovers from their whispered confidences.

"The second bell—the bell for dinner!" cried Edna, starting up. "Let us put a very brave face on it. I know Violet and Lady Burton are waiting in the drawing-room. Let us go in boldly. It is all Violet's fault, anyway. Why did she send you in there, as she did?"

"For my endless and complete happiness," said the marquis. "Come, Edna, let us go to the drawing-room with the best grace we can."

As soon as they had crossed the drawing-room threshold, Alwood mischievously took Edna's hand. At the other side of the room Lady Burton stood waiting, in her favorite dress of dark purple velvet, and the Countess of Leigh, in heavy black crape.

Alwood led Edna toward her friends, and said:

"Here is a fair maiden all forlorn, whom I found without natural or legal guardians, and whom I besought to take me in the place of both. And now, dear Lady Burton and Countess of Leigh, as you two are her nearest and tenderest friends, we come to you for blessing and congratulation."

"My darling, may Heaven's best blessing always be upon you!" said Lady Burton, fervently, drawing Edna to her, and kissing her lovely, blushing face.

That was a delightful evening at Leigh Towers. Years and years had it been since so much pure, unselfish happiness had shed its radiance there.

As they rose from their places before the fire in the wide hall, where, according to custom, the "yule-log" had been lighted, Lord Alwood drew Edna toward him, and, taking her white hand in his, said:

"This little hand is my beautiful and treasured Christmas gift. Take, then, my Edna, this ring, in token of our love and faith;" and he slipped a diamond half-circle on her slender finger. "And," he added, in a lower whisper, "be very merciful to me, and give me soon permission to guard it with another plainer but more potent ring, at St. George's."

Who will doubt that, when the three ladies went up stairs, and were comfortably arranged in dressing-gowns, they gathered in Edna's boudoir to "talk it over?"

But very early in the talk, the little earl, who had strong will and strong lungs of his own, set up such a lusty shout for his mamma, that Violet, perforce, bade her friends "good-night," saying, "I must go to my naughty boy."

The little countess dropped into tranquil slumber, with her child on her arm.

A light snow had fallen when they woke on Christmas Day. It lay like a fleecy vail over shrub and tree, and glittered like countless gems in the sun, as the little family from the Towers set out to walk to the church for the Christmas service. Earl Rupert, in Jenny's arms, shouted for joy at the sight; for Violet, to the amusement of her friends, had insisted on Rupert being taken to church.

"He must begin good habits young," said Violet, "and he is always to go with me to church on Christmas Day. If he cries, Jenny can carry him out."

But Rupert did not cry. He behaved to the edification of everybody, though it must be confessed he had the watch of his guardian, Lord Alwood, for a plaything.

There were no festivities at the Towers, so lately bereaved, but there was an immense giving away of presents in the great hall, and all the children of the tenants got acquainted with their little earl, as he was carried, laughing and crowing, among them.

Edna for some days insisted upon delaying her marriage until Violet's first year of mourning should have passed, and she could put on a lavender gown and come to the wedding. But Violet joined her entreaties to those of

the marquis to combat this resolve, and finally Edna yielded, and the marriage was set for rosy June.

A very beautiful marriage-day it was, with no ill omens; and though Violet could not appear at it, she kept the day in her heart, and had the gardener bring for her room and for the dinner-table bouquets of white roses.

CHAPTER LXI.

“NOT TO CONDEMN, BUT TO SAVE.”

That was a very peaceful and happy, if quiet, summer at Leigh Towers. After the close of the London season and the marriage of Edna, Lady Burton came to Violet, and though nothing was said about it, as by a tacit understanding, there she remained.

Little Rupert was running all about, was filling the home with his laughter and his prattle, and Violet found a world of joy in his instruction, feeling that she was accomplishing wonders when she taught him the names of things. Lady Grace Churchill came for a visit, bringing a wee Violet Churchill, two months old; and when Rupert kissed this infant's closed pink hands, and tried to poke his fingers in her wide black eyes, her mamma did not scruple to build air castles, to be inhabited by these two babes when they had grown up and were man and wife.

Violet said nothing.

“I declare, Violet,” said the merry Lady Churchill, “why don't you amuse yourself by plans like mine, all love and roses and wedding favors?”

“To play with love is to play with edged tools,” said Violet.

“Come, child, don't you believe in love?”

“Indeed I do,” said Violet, earnestly—“in love, undying, faithful, and true—‘Douglas love;’ but that is, to me, a love too deep, sacred, precious, to be carelessly spoken of.”

“You'll have to speak of it and think of it too, when there is a family of children growing up,” said Grace, with wondrous matronly airs. “And be sure, my little cherub,”

she added, kissing her black-eyed doll, "your mamma never will be one of those cold wretches—

"'Old and formal, fitted to a pretty part,
With a little hoard of maxims, preaching down a daughter's heart.'"

All the Leigh affairs had been looked into at last, and it was seen what enormous sums Lord Leigh had, since his marriage, cast into that bottomless pit of gambling. Hard as he had striven during life to hide his crying vices from the world, and keep before men an undeserved fair name, his evil habits must come out like ghouls to mock out and gibber above his tomb.

It was this thought, and the thought that her son must grow up to a sullied name, and to condemn his father's memory, that brought from the eyes of the little countess a rain of tears, when next day she and Lord Alwood, and Mr. Storms and the steward, were consulting together in the library.

"What I want is," she said, "that all these deficiencies may be made good, and everything made right, so that no one shall ever know that things were so wrong, that my boy shall never hear his father spoken against. When he is of age, I want him to find all his affairs in such order that he shall feel that he had the wisest, kindest, most exemplary father in the world. What will become of him, if he cannot regard his father in that way? There is all my income—every penny of it. I do not want any money. I will live here very plainly. Just tell me how I can reduce the expenses, and give you a large margin of money to make all good, and protect Norman's memory."

The three men looked at each other, with moist eyes. He had been a bad man, and a bad husband, but what noble faithfulness and unselfishness she showed toward him!

Then a light came to Violet's face.

"Why cannot I advance all this money and let it come back, just as the estate can bear it? I can make Uncle Henry promise never to tell this sad affair. I will go to London and see him to-morrow."

"Take Mr. Storms along to show him the security is good," said Lord Alwood.

And so next morning the widowed heiress-countess went to hot, dusty, deserted London, taking grim, matter-of-fact

Mr. Storms for her sole attendant. She went, intent on rescuing from dishonor the name she wore so sadly.

Henry Ainslie was nearly dumb with amazement when his niece came to his counting-room and begged for a private interview.

"Dear uncle," said Violet, taking his hand, when they were alone, and laying her cheek against his shoulder, "I come to you for help and advice; and first, you must promise never to tell what I shall say to you to-day."

"I may need to," said Mr. Ainslie, doubtfully.

"But you will not, and must never, never. I confide only in you. Will you promise?"

"Yes," said Uncle Ainslie, much flattered.

And the little countess told her story.

"Do you mean to say he has devastated the immense sum he got with you at your marriage?" cried the banker.

"That went to pay debts—he married me for that," said poor Violet.

"And got through with about as much more. How long is it since you were married, Violet?"

"A little over three years," faltered Violet.

"Heavens and earth!" cried the scandalized financier, "if he had lived three years longer, you would all have been beggars."

Violet laid her hand on his lips.

"Uncle, I come, not to condemn him, but to save his reputation."

"And how do you propose to do it?"

Violet told her plan, and had Mr. Storms explain the business part thereof.

"You will make this loan in my behalf, uncle."

"And you really mean to keep out of society, and economize year after year for this man's sake?"

"And Rupert's, you know," said Violet, gently.

"Buried alive at Leigh Towers!"

"But Lady Burton will bury herself with me."

CHAPTER LXII.

"THE SAFE, SWEET MORNING BREAKS, ON LAND AND SEA."

Life at the Towers sped happily, if quietly. Pleasant friends went and came. The little earl was quite a wonder

of beauty and brightness. And now fully two years had passed since the day when nearly all the county followed the funeral train of Lord Leigh.

"Violet, my dear," said Lady Burton, on a bright late September morning, "I wish you would do me a favor."

"With all my heart. What is it?" said the countess.

"Lay by this morning garb and resume other dress. You have worn this long enough. Let little Rupert remember his mother as bright and young, and not always in this somber guise."

It was a year since Violet had used her crape and bombazine, but still her wardrobe boasted only black, or, at brightest, lavender, and she wore her cap. She did not make any remonstrances in favor of "wearing black always." She knew that that might do where the heart mourns as the black suggests. She only said:

"Why, Lady Burton, if I lay aside these things, what have I to wear?"

"Kate and I have been in a little plot," said Lady Burton, as Kate opened a wardrobe door. "See, we have prepared several toilets for you."

Violet could not help looking with some longing at the costumes, as Kate laid them on the bed and chairs. She had always liked bright, pretty things, and she was still young, and her cheerful, arch spirits had been rising again in the free, safe, happy life of past months.

"Let me make you pretty for breakfast," said Kate, for it was yet early, and Violet was sitting by her dressing-table, and Kate was arranging the lovely brown hair.

So Kate put away the cap and did the brown hair in its old-time pretty rings and general fluffiness, and dressed Violet in a white pique, trimmed with quaint Irish point and beautified with knots of cream-colored ribbon. Then she put at her neck a great cluster of purple and golden pansies.

"I declare!" cried Lady Burton, "you look your old self, without a day's change. One might fancy that the last six years had turned backward, and you were little Miss Ainslie, not yet introduced——"

But then a child's voice rang shrill and clear from the terrace, where Rupert was playing horses with his faithful Jenny.

"No, never that," said Violet, looking at her friend, in

her witching way, between smiles and tears. "For it is better as it is. What would I, what would the world do, without Rupert?"

Then they went down to breakfast, and Rupert, who had feasted on porridge and milk, two hours before, put his sunny head into the room, and shouted with admiration of his "pretty mamma."

After breakfast Lady Burton said:

"Violet, I wish I had some wild-cardinal flowers to paint for this velvet screen I am making for Edna's birthday. Do you remember where they grow, just in the hollow near the spring, that they call the 'Maid's Bower?'"

"Oh, yes, and they are abundant there now."

"Would you not go and get me some? I think the walk will be good for you. You have been sitting over your accounts, like a clerk, these two days."

So Violet took a little basket, and a pair of scissors, and put on a quaint, childish scoop bonnet, made of Irish point over cream silk, from under which her lovely, round, dimpled, rosy face looked out in the most bewitching way imaginable, and away she went to the "Maid's Bower."

But when she had filled her basket, she stood suddenly still, and went into a dream—for the slumberous beauty of the warm golden day brought back the idyl of her life—the woods in Lincolnshire, where Kenneth and she had wandered hand in hand. She had been having letters, for a year, from Kenneth, nice, friendly letters, about his travels and his ward, but with no word of coming home. She sighed. There were times, when her loving, clinging heart longed after Kenneth, as the one great comfort in all the world.

"Violet!"

The voice made her start and drop the basket, and tremble like a frightened fawn.

And there was Kenneth! Bronzed some with foreign suns, and with his whiskers rather fuller, but still her own Saxon Kenneth, with the smiling blue eyes, and the winning smile, the strong and loyal heart. And she held out her hands to him, with a cry of:

"Kenneth! Oh, Kenneth!"

He clasped her in his arms. His Violet, his only, his forever!

They sat down under a beach-tree; and now at last he

could tell her how he had passionately loved her all those long, long years; and now she could listen to that outpouring of his love.

The long and terrible bitterness of her heart had fled away like a dark and hideous dream of night, when safe, sweet morning breaks over land and sea. Her heart had found its true shelter, and she rested in sweet content with in the circle of his arm. Suddenly she smiled in his face.

“Kenneth, I know you had planned this with your mother.”

And so Violet returned to London the next season, and was again presented at court, but now as Lady Keith. And all that London season Violet Keith shone as a bright, particular star in London life, and for another season thereafter. But not merely was she noted for her fair face and charming manner, her immense wealth and exquisite taste, as for her lovely sympathy, her wide generosity, her noble rectitude, for all that makes a woman admirable, as mother, wife, and friend.

One evening, in the House of Peers, a door opened, not far behind the famous woolsack, whereon the Lord Chancellor sat in the biggest of wigs, with an enormous hat laid at his right side. Through the door came a very beautiful boy of six, dressed in a suit of purple velvet, with full lace ruffles. The little fellow stole softly along to the side of the woolsack, and, awed by the imposing presence of all his brother peers, and the bench of bishops in full lawn sleeves, he gave what he considered a very private and confidential grasp of his friend, the Lord Chancellor's arm. This was Rupert, Earl of Leigh, at his first appearance in the Upper House. His clutch of the Chancellor was seen with a quiet smile by his two guardians, Lord Keith, and the Marquis of Alwood, in the body of the House, and by two very beautiful peeresses in their gallery, Edna, of Alwood, and Violet Keith.

[THE END.]

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